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NOVEMBER 25¢

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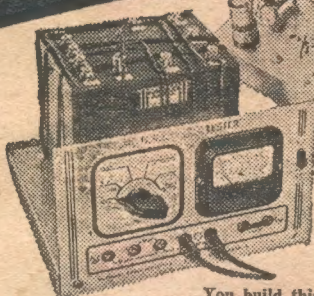
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# hollywood DETECTIVE

Vol. 7

NOVEMBER, 1946

No. 5

*Feature Novelettes by Robert Leslie Bellem,  
Starring Dan Turner, Hollywood's Super-Sleuth*

## CARELESS CORPSE

4

*That bogus postman brought Dan Turner a splendid special-delivery whack with a blackjack—thereby involving the ace movietown hawkshaw with low killery, high finance and dangerous bafflement!*

## TREACHERY PULLS THE TRIGGER

86

*Dan was startled when the monocolled publisher-gambler didn't answer his questions—but the grim gumshoe was even more startled when he discovered the reason, which was unsettling to the health of several quite rough lugs.*

### Special Novelettes

## MURDER GOES SWIMMING

By Paul Hanna 20

*Those two screwball reporters had a dazzling scoop figured out when they rescued a movie actress from the briny—then suddenly they were up to their necks in killery trouble on dry land!*

## HOMICIDAL HOLIDAY

By Laurence Donovan 60

*Shamus Kent had intended merely to go fishing, and he did indeed—fishing for a ruthless murderer who had already struck twice and was now eager to add Kent, a movie star and her director to his string of dead items.*

*Outstanding Dan Turner Novel by Robert Leslie Bellem,  
Complete in This Issue*

## THE RIDDLE THUMBS A RIDE

36

*By way of Dan's jalopy, that beauteous bride of the aging flicker star hitch-hiked herself and the famous shamus into one of the locoocest mysteries ever to run wild even in movietown!*

### Special Short Stories

## DEATH ON THE DOWNBEAT

By Frank Roberts 78

*The detective sergeant had to give a heel, whom he hated and suspected, every break!*

## GLASS FOR GALLARDO

By Harley L. Court 100

*With a flock of vicious hood gunmen out to nail him, Nolan needed more than army tricks!*

### Dan Turner in Pictures

## ALIBI POLICY

52

### Crime Features

## Saving On Safes Is No Saving!

By Will Nichols 6

## Earliest American Court

By William McCombs 129

*Cover Painting by Joseph Sokoli*

Robert Gwinn, Editor

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# Saving on Safes Is No Saving!

By WILL NICHOLS

**A**N ANCIENT movie gag, popular with the creators of custard-pie two-reelers, had the simple-minded owner of a safe conveniently paint the numbers of the combination on the safe's door. (We can remember Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, and Larry Semon all using this side-splitter—Red Skelton should be coming up with it any day now!)

But during the war, when the only safes manufactured were made for the armed forces, this comedy procedure was employed for a strictly real-life purpose by many a hard-headed business man who owned a fire-resistive safe. The object was to prevent damage at the heavy hands of burglars to an irreplaceable item whose main function was to protect from fire papers of no value to the peteman. (Our papers we have always kept in an old moosehead named Charles, and up to now we have not gone in for safe-cracking, having made a comfortable living smuggling bubble-gum.)

However, a man who has not just a fire-resistive safe but a modern burglar-resistive one has really no need to fear that burglars will mess *that* up, for the way the darn things are constructed nowadays, they're practically dent-proof. A good professional burglar who has kept abreast of latest developments in his field will merely sigh heavily when

confronted by one of these modern Gibaltars, and pass along in search of a nice, brittle cast-iron job, which he can probably bust with his mother-in-law's brass knucks.

And doubtless he will quickly find it. For while the average business man would never give house room to a pre-1917 refrigerator or stove at home, it's amazing how often you'll find him using an antiquated safe at the office. If he does he's a dope, and almost deserves to be burglarized.

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There is still an acute shortage of the kind of paper on which this magazine is usually printed. Therefore you may find that this issue does not seem so thick as before. The publishers want to assure you that actually there are one third **MORE** pages than heretofore, and to ask your forbearance until the paper situation becomes normal.

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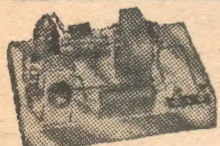


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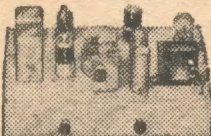
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# Careless Corpse

**I**N THE private-snooping racket it pays to keep your guard up at all times. I've learned this by bitter experience, but once in a while I forget—

and my forgetfulness generally dumps me in the grease up to my tonsils. Take the fake special-delivery messenger with the blackjack, for instance.



*That bogus postman brought Dan Turner a splendid solid whack with a blackjack and it was a highly special delivery—thereby involving the ace movietown hawkshaw with low killery and high finance and dangerous bafflement! . . .*



## By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

It was bordering on midnight when he tapped discreetly at the portal of my bachelor apartment and called: "Special for Mr. Dan Turner," in modulated accents. I was sipping a short snort of Vat 69 for a nightcap, and it never dawned on me that by opening the door I'd be pitching myself spang into the middle of a kill frame. Maybe it was the guy's quiet voice that lulled me. Maybe he was a hypnotist in his spare time, though I've never heard of a mesmerist functioning through solid woodwork. Anyhow I was expecting a letter that night or the following morning, so I let him in.

I'll give him credit: there was noth-

ing about him to arouse your suspicions. He was a middle-aged, tired-looking hombre in a regulation mail carrier's shabby uniform. His eyes were mild behind thick-lensed cheaters, his face had an unhealthy puffiness splotted by what could have been either pimples or boils, and he actually handed me an envelope with my name and address typed on it. He also had a receipt blank and a pencil. "Sign on the third line, please," he said in the same soothing tone he'd used originally.

I did what a person always does. I took

Illustrated by Paul H. H. Stone

*Taking advantage of the quail's surprise, I went into a flying tackle and dived in the general direction of her neat gams.*





the receipt and the pencil, turned, held the blank against the wall and scribbled my signature on it. My back was to the guy and he had a perfect shot at my cranium.

He teed off.

*Boom!* An explosion of pain roared through me, blasted me all the way to my shoestrings. Klieg lights made pinwheel patterns in my glims, an atomic bomb took my grey cells apart, and I plunged into a deep black well of unconsciousness. For me it was the end of a chapter.

THE sequel started thirty minutes later. A new kind of pain dragged me back to my senses: a stinging, counter-irritant series of slaps across the mush. There's always something about a smack on the puss that will needle a man's ire, no matter how groggy he may be from a previous pummeling. Particularly if the spanks are delivered by a meaty palm with plenty of heft behind it. I groaned, stirred feebly on the floor, and mumbled: "Cut that out before I kick all the warts off you, whoever you are."

"Aha," a rumbling voice growled. "So you've decided to do the sensible thing and wake up, hey?"

"Who wouldn't?" I said, opening my bleary glims and fastening the focus on a large, scowling character who was stooping over me. As clarity gradually seeped into my scrambled brain, I recognized this beefy individual. He was my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad. "Nobody but a corpse could stay asleep with you whapping him on the complexion," I complained. "Lay off."

"Speaking of corpses," Dave's manner was ominous.

I said testily: "Let's not," and touched the back of my conk where there was a lump the size of third base. "Damn his tripes," I said.

"Damn whose tripes, Sherlock?"

I sat up. "That special-delivery messenger. He bopped me." I blinked. "Say, what the hell are you doing here?"

"As if you didn't know," he sneered.

"If I knew I wouldn't ask you," I said. "Help me up."

"Not yet," he told me grimly, and put the flat of his hand on my chest. "Not until you answer my questions."

"You haven't asked any questions."

"All right, all right, I will. We'll start with this one. Who was Rick Caffrey?"

I copped a puzzled upward hinge at Dave's glum map. It struck me as mildly strange that he would mention Caffrey on this particular night, because only that same day Caffrey had phoned me, hired my professional services, and promised to send me a letter that would explain in detail what he wanted done. The letter would contain, in addition, two hundred hermans by way of advance retainer. At least this was what the man had told me on the phone, and now I told the same thing to Donaldson. "It was Caffrey's note with the dough in it that I was expecting," I said. "Only instead of money I got my noggin black-jacked by a gee in special-delivery grey. Which is all I know," I finished sourly.

He said: "Very interesting, but beside the point. What I asked you is, who was Rick Caffrey?"

"A beard," I said.

"Don't give me double talk."

"What double talk? A beard is a beard: movie lingo for an actor with spinach. Chin foliage. What kind of Hollywood cop are you, not knowing that? When an extra registers with Central Casting he gets classified as to type. If he's got whiskers, he's a beard. So Caffrey is a beard."

"Was a beard," Dave corrected me.

"You mean he shaved it off?"

"I mean he's dead."

AS he said this, Dave heisted me from supine to perpendicular and gave me a half-spin. The sudden movement, plus the bruised condition of my conk, made me momentarily as dizzy as a drunk in a revolving door. Then the haze drifted from my peepers and I gave issue to a flabbergasted yelp as I lamped somebody huddled in my favorite easy chair across the room. The bozo was elderly and sported a luxuriant growth of quills from chin, cheeks and



lips, a beaver that spread down to his chest and matted soggly there with a dark red-brown ooze of ketchup from the hole where he'd been stabbed. His kisser leered toothlessly, his eyes stared glassily and he would never be any deader if he lived to be a hundred.

"Rick Caffrey!" I yodeled.

Dave said: "That's all I wanted to know, pal. It fits."

"It fits what?" I demanded.

"I got an anonymous phone tip at headquarters a while ago. It was a disguised voice saying I'd find a corpse of that name in the apartment of one Dan Turner, private snoop. So here I am and here you are and here's the corpse, and—"

"And what comes next?" I cut in.

"Next you tell me why you killed him," Dave said.

I tried to wither him with a glance but it didn't work. "You make me tired," I said in disgusted accents. "If the cat has kittens in the oven, it doesn't make them biscuits, does it? Okay. Just because there's a cadaver in my flat, it doesn't mean I'm the killer. That's the trouble with you. Always trying to hang some ridiculous rap on me."

"Not at all," he pouted. "You're a friend of mine. By the same token I can't stand around letting my friends get away with murder. Not even you."

I went to my cellarette, dosed myself with Scotch to blunt the throbbing in my skull where I'd been maced. "Did your anonymous tipster actually accuse me of the bump?"

"Not exactly. He said I would find a dead guy—"

"He. So the call came from a man."

"It was a man's voice, yeah. Muffled."

"That narrows it down," I said. "It eliminates the female percentage of the Hollywood population. Now look, stupid. Would I be silly enough to commit killery in my own stash and then render myself senseless so you could make an easy pinch?"

"Maybe you got into a brawl with Caffrey. Maybe he bopped you and you stabbed him, and then after that the

blow caught up with you, sort of a delayed-action effect, and you blacked out." Dave preened himself, very proud of his theorizing.

I said: "Whereupon the corpse got up and phoned headquarters announcing his own demise, eh?"

"No. Somebody else must have done the phoning."

"Sure. And that same somebody else is the person you'd better look for. In other words, the special-delivery messenger."

"You mean he conked you and then brought the body into your apartment? Hogwash, Hawkshaw. Nobody but a damned fool would take that big a risk. He'd be seen hauling the stiff into the building. I can't buy that."

I said: "The dead gee could have walked in under his own power."

"A walking corpse? Come now. That's going too far."

"Nuts," I grated. "Use your head. Suppose Caffrey decided to call on me in person tonight instead of sending me a letter. Okay, assume for the sake of argument that he wanted to hire me to guard him against some unknown party who was thirsting for his gore. Suppose this unknown party learned about it, got dressed in a letter carrier's rig and came here ahead of Caffrey, knocking me out and then hiding in ambush until Caffrey showed up. Caffrey walks into the trap and gets stabbed. Having butched him, our fake mailman lams, calls you up at headquarters, gives you the tip, and rings off before you can trace the connection. That way he covers his tracks and leaves me with a defunct beard in my tepee, to say nothing of a violent headache. Savvy the setup?"

DONALDSON'S fingernails made rasping noises as he scratched at his chin bristles. "It meshes," he admitted. He ankled to my telephone, dialed homicide, ordered out a technical squad and got the law's ponderous machinery moving. First he assigned some of his minions to the job of checking all genuine special delivery messengers. Then he



had a reader put out on KGPL notifying all cars to be on the lookout for a suspicious character in post office grey, which struck me as pretty far south in waste motion. The killer had probably shucked his threads by this time and changed into something less conspicuous.

That's how it is with cops, though: you can't budge them out of established routine. Dave hung up, turned to me and said: "So far so good. The next thing is to pry into the Caffrey guy's private life and find out about his enemies."

I set fire to a gasper; shook my head as I exhaled smoke. "No dice on that one, bub," I told him.

"What do you mean, no dice? We know he had at least one enemy. He was murdered, wasn't he? So all I have to do is go to his home and ask his family—"

"He didn't have any," I said.

"Didn't have any family?"

"Nor home," I said.

Dave glowered. "Everybody's got a home, even if it's only some furnished room."

*Dave heisted me from supine to perpendicular and gave me a half-spin.*





"Not Caffrey," I said. "He lived in a tree. Or a cave, I'm not sure which." Then, wearily, I added: "For hell's sake, haven't you tabbed him yet? He was a landmark. He was the Hermit of the Hollywoodland Hills."

Crimson surged into Donaldson's map. He goggled at me, then at the corpse, then back at me. "I'll be damned!" he choked. "No wonder I thought he looked kind of familiar. I've seen him a million times on the Boulevard and up and down Vine Street, walking along in sandals and a hunk of bed sheet."

"He's the one."

"But I didn't tab him just now because he's wearing a suit. It makes him look different."

I said: "Being deceased also makes him look different. Don't let it embarrass you too much, chum. Policemen aren't supposed to be too bright. What the hell."

This caused Dave's indignation to come to an abrupt boil. "So I'm not bright," he said through clenched uppers and lowers. "The only smart snoops are the private kind, like you. The rest of us are numbskulls. I hope the thought

comforts you while you're languishing in a nice clean cell."

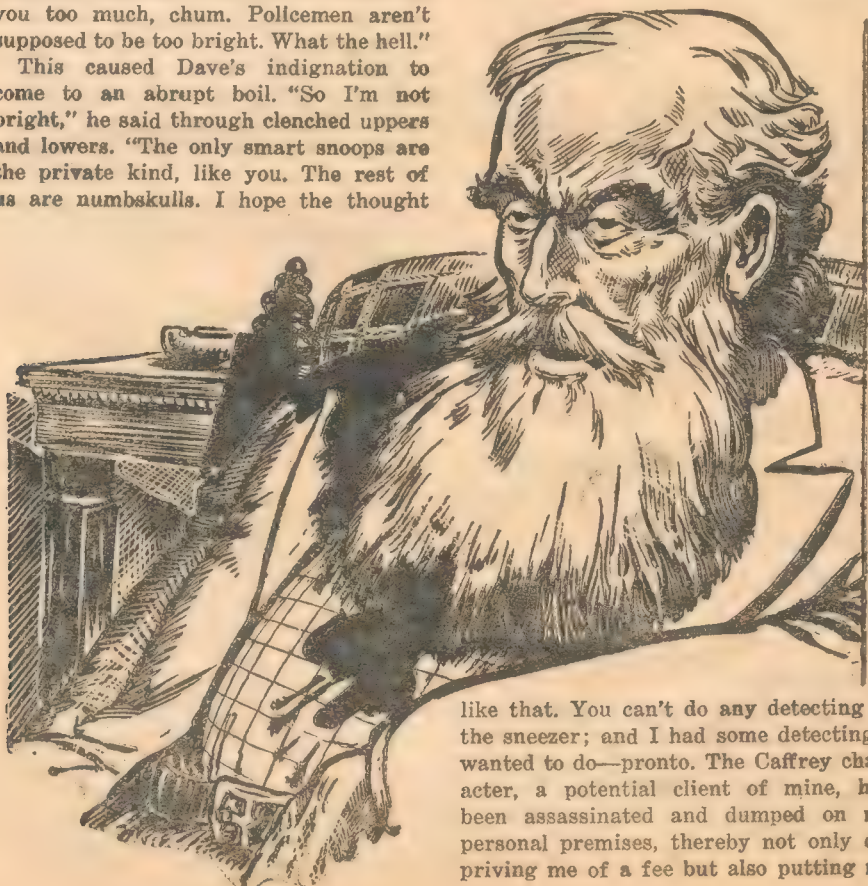
"Wait a minute. You can't arrest me."

"That's what you think."

"But I've told you how the thing must have happened. Accusing me is as crazy as pouring gasoline on your Wheaties."

"Nobody's accusing you," he said, grimly. "I'm just going to hold you as a material witness, until we nab the fake postman. If you're lucky we may pick him up within a week or so. On the other hand, it may take months. However it goes, we'll need you to identify him. And to make sure you'll be on deck I'm going to install you in the bastille."

This, of course, was sheer spite. The hell of it was, he might make it stick; and I didn't crave any part of a raw deal



like that. You can't do any detecting in the sneezer; and I had some detecting I wanted to do—pronto. The Caffrey character, a potential client of mine, had been assassinated and dumped on my personal premises, thereby not only depriving me of a fee but also putting me



behind a very awkward eight ball. I could almost see the headlines: **FILM ACTOR SLAIN WHILE SEEKING DICK'S PROTECTION. BIT PLAYER MURDERED IN BODYGUARD'S APARTMENT.** It would play hob with my rep as a hardboiled hero. It would ruin my business. I'd be washed up.

There was only one way out of the mess, as far as I could see. That was to clean up the Caffrey killing, collar the guilty ginzo, and hand him over to justice. I couldn't let the cops beat me to the punch or it would look as if I wasn't big enough to take care of my own troubles. And if Dave Donaldson juggled me as a material witness, my hands would be tied.

I said: "So you're going to hold me."

"Yeah."

"I can't talk you out of it, eh?"

"Not while I'm in my right mind."

Well, that meant I had to jar him loose from his right mind. I shrugged, let my shoulders droop despondently and then doubled my right fist, swung for his dewlaps. The punch connected and he went down on his hip pockets, floundered like a fly swimming in molasses. He was still swimming as I catapulted over his poundage and went out the front door with my coat tails dipping gravel.

**I** BARRELED out of the apartment building under forced draft; sprinted through the quiet midnight as fast as I could pelt. It would be too dangerous, I realized, to get my jalopy from its stall in the basement garage; Dave would put out a radio dragnet and I'd get picked up before you could whistle Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto. For better or for worse I was afoot and I had to like it.

There was one thing I could be thankful for, though. I knew a few tidbits of information about the late lamented Rick Caffrey which I hadn't told to Donaldson. This was very fortunate indeed, because it gave me a slight edge as I started my investigation. I had

a starting place, which was more than Dave had.

For instance, I was hep to the fact that Caffrey's hermit act wasn't as kosher as it had seemed. True, he spent a lot of time up in the hills above Hollywood, communing with the squirrels and feasting on acorns. That, however, had been largely a publicity gag. It earned him occasional mention in the gossip columns and the fan magazines, and when he wandered down into town he was always good for a stray dollar from tourists who asked him to pose for their kodaks. Moreover, it usually gave him the inside track on studio calls when some director decided he needed an extra or a bit player with facial foliage.

But how did he get those studio calls? And what did he do when it rained? There's no shelter in the kind of trees that grow up in our dinky hills, and the caves aren't equipped with telephones. As a matter of fact, there aren't any caves. I happened to know that Caffrey had a duck-in spot, a cheap sleazy hotel on a side street just off Sunset, to which he repaired when the great open spaces palled on him. It was there that he got his mail and made his phone connections with the various movie lots; and it was there that I headed after eluding Dave Donaldson's clutches.

The walk made a new man of me. My noggin stopped throbbing and my lungs were so full of fresh air they sat up and barked. Presently I gained my destination and barked into the four-story fleabag where Caffrey had maintained a sub-rosa room; made for the imitation marble desk at one side of the dismal lobby. A combination clerk and phone operator was sitting at the switchboard with a receiver to his ear, probably listening in on some tenant's private conversation. He quit, though, when he piped me moving toward him. "Something?" he cocked a supercilious eyebrow at me.

A small sign on the counter read: *Clerk on Duty, Percival Hassard.* "Yeah, Percy," I said. "Tell me the number of Rick Caffrey's room."



He frowned at my familiarity with his front monicker. He was a sleekly barbered bozo, hollow-cheeked and probably in his forties but with a powdered, babyish complexion that tried to

look younger. "Caffrey?" he asked.

"Rick Caffrey."

"You're sure he's stopping here? — Sir?" he added reflectively.

"Yeah, positive."

He went through the motions of consulting some records. "Oh, yes. Mr. Rick Caffrey. That's Room 209. But I'm not sure he's in. I just came on duty at twelve. Shall I ring him?"

"Never mind. I'll go on up." I let him

*I spooned him a haymaker on the prow  
that knocked him neck over appetite.*





see my tin. "Cop business, bub. Keep it under your hat." Then I trudged up a flight of creaky stairs and skulked to Caffrey's door without being noticed. I got out my set of skeleton keys, found one that worked the cheap lock and let myself in.

Darkness enfolded me as I kicked the portal shut. And then an unexpected dagger of light skewered me in my tracks as I started to turn; drenched me in baleful brilliance. The stabbing beam came from a flashlight in the hands of somebody I couldn't see because the glare had damned near blinded me even though I wasn't staring directly into it.

My hearing was okay, though. And there was no mistaking the menace in the she-male voice that said tautly: "Better say your prayers, Mister Caffrey. I'm going to kill you."

**I** FROZE, but made a rapid recovery. "Who, me?" I said, and turned directly into the light. "I think you've made a mistake. I'm not Caffrey, as any fool can plainly see. Caffrey was old and wore a beard. I'm young, handsome, and I shave smooth. Well, comparatively young, anyhow."

There was an audible intake of breath, sharp, startled. "I—I thought you were someone else—"

"So you did, sister, so you did," I grunted. Then, taking advantage of the quail's surprise, I went into a flying tackle and dived in the general direction of her neat gams. Moreover, I hit them. It was more by instinct than sight, however, because I was still partially blinded by her flash beam. I simply guessed where her ankles ought to be, ducked low in case she started shooting, and slammed against her with the full force of my hundred and ninety pounds. A moaning whimper escaped her, and down she went in a swirl of silk dress. She squirmed as I squashed her to the carpet; tried to get loose. We wrestled a while, and I won. I got the electric torch from her left hand and pried a small Colt automatic from her right. Then,

triumphantly, I edged away and treated her to spray of illumination.

What I looked at was very soothing to the optic nerves. She was a husky, muscular red-head, pretty as a beauty contest winner and shapely as a swimming champion. At a rough guess she was in her smooth twenties, and even in her mussed-up condition she was toothsome enough to be anybody's pin-up queen.

She staggered upright and arranged her attire. "You—y—you—"

"Skip the small talk," I said. Then I added: "So you were hoping to plug Rick Caffrey, hunh?"

"Y-yes—that is—I mean—"

I said: "Let's take it one step at a time. First, your name."

"I w-won't tell you."

"Oh. Stubborn." I sidled to a wall switch, flipped it. Now I could do without the flashlight; the overhead bulb was much more satisfactory. I gave the jane a brief glimpse of my special badge. "You can tell me now or you can talk in jail," I said.

Fear came into her hazel eyes. "You're a p-policeman?"

"Private. I'm Dan Turner. Maybe you've heard of me."

This seemed to startle the everlasting daylight out of her. "Dan Turner? Then you're the dirty rat who was helping Caffrey against my fath—I mean—that is—"

"Your father, eh? Now we're getting somewhere. Go on, tell me the rest of it."

She clammed up. "No."

I said: "Look, baby. Whether you realize it or not, you're in a nasty pickle. It's against the law to threaten people with guns. You could be tossed in the cooler for that. The penalty for murder is even stiffer."

"Murder? But I haven't m-murdered anyone. Yet."

"Somebody did," I said levelly. "Somebody killed Rick Caffrey in my apartment less than an hour ago."

"No. N-no, oh-h-h, no . . . !"

"But yes. Now the way I see this clam-bake, Caffrey was engaged in some she-



nanigan against your father. That much you've let slip. Secondly, you think I was mixed up in the deal. It so happens you're wrong about that. True, Caffrey intended to hire me; but he never told me what it was about, and he was bumped off before I had a chance to talk to him. In other words, his hasty demise left me completely in the dark. Believe it or not."

She studied me. "And you th-think I killed him?"

"No," I said frankly. "Because you were here in his room waiting for him, waiting to blast him. When I barged in you thought I was Caffrey and threatened to shoot. Therefore you didn't realize he was already dead. So you can't be the one who croaked him."

"Th-thank you."

"Not at all," I said darkly. "Logic is logic. But on the other hand, you were planning to bump him. Why? Because of something he was doing, or going to do, to your father. Whatever it was, it must have been pretty bad. Bad enough, perhaps, to cause your old gent to commit murder."

**S**HE stiffened but kept her voice even. "That's what I thought you'd say. It's not true, of course."

"What makes you so sure?"

"I know my dad."

"And just who is he?"

She clammed up again. "I've said all I'm going to say."

"Excuse me if I contradict you. You'll talk plenty, angel, before this fish-fry is finished. Either to me, or to the bulls at headquarters. Now just what sort of stunt was Caffrey trying to pull on your father?"

"I d-don't know anything about it." Suddenly she reached into the bodice of her frock, whipped out a thin sheet of paper, crumpled it into a wad and thrust it in her mouth; started chewing vigorously.

That made me sore. I leaped at her, grabbed her, dealt her a stinging smack across the mush and then forced my fingers past her teeth; yanked out the



*Her aim was lousy. Instead of hitting the desired target, the vase conked me.*

paper barely in time to keep from getting my thumb bitten off like a hunk of banana. I slapped her again. Hard. My temper was frayed around the edges and I was in no mood to make with the chivalry.

She sobbed, deep in her throat. "Please, Mr. Turner—"

"Shut up," I growled, and started to unwad the soggy paper. I could see writing on it; a penciled scrawl that was almost illegible now, and no damned wonder.

The red-haired chick stretched her arms toward me. "Please, Mr. Turner, don't read th-that."

"Quiet, sis."

"I'll pay you—money—anything you want—"

"Right now I'm not interested in money," I said, and meant it. "Shut up."

There were tears in her blurry peepers, and not entirely ffrom the slaps I'd handed her. "Please—there's nothing in that note. I mean there's nothing that concerns you."

"Oh, sure not," I leered at her. "You just tried to eat it because you liked the flavor. Spearmint no doubt."

"No. I mean—that is—it was just something I got out of that waste-basket over there, and—"

I said: "The hell you utter. You were prowling Caffrey's wigwam here and found a discarded letter connected with the monkey business he was pulling on your pappy, is that it? And you've got



the unadulterated crust to tell me it's nothing that concerns me. Toots, your psychology is abysmal. I wouldn't believe a lie like that if I told it myself. Now pipe down."

"Mr. Turner, if you read that letter I'll kill you!"

"Much obliged for the warning," I said. Then I slammed her down on the sagging bed, whisked out my handcuffs and nipped her wrists after running the link around one of the uprights of the metal bedstead's headboard. "And if you start yeeeping I'll gag you," I added. "With one of my wool socks."

SHE gasped at the thought; subsided into silence. I finished unwadding the sheet of paper and scanned it; tensed when I saw my own name on it, and Rick Caffrey's signature. This was the letter he had intended to send me, special delivery, only to change his mind and visit me in person—a visit that had got him abolished. I read the scrawled words:

"Mr. Turner:

"Enclosed find two hundred dollars as per our telephone conversation. This note will explain what I want done and why I want you to do it for me.

"More than twenty years ago I was a convict on a Georgia chain gang, serving a term for robbing a bank in a small town. My accomplice, several years younger than myself, was a man named Leonard Dolan. I say accomplice, though he was actually in ignorance of what I was doing. He merely drove the getaway car and didn't learn of this bank heist I'd pulled until it was too late to do anything about it. When the cops caught up with us he managed to escape with the stolen money, a sum in excess of sixty thousand dollars. I was captured and sentenced.

"Some time later, Dolan was also captured and convicted, but he never told where he'd hidden the loot and it was never recovered. Much later, in prison, he informed me that he had really intended to see that the money went back

to the bank I stole it from, but he delayed doing it until the heat died. He was afraid he might be arrested with it in his possession, which of course would be just too bad for him.

"Unluckily he got picked up before he could make this restitution. He then tried to make a deal with the authorities, exchanging the money for his own immunity. The prosecutor refused, thinking the cash would be discovered sooner or later anyhow, and why turn a prisoner loose? So Leonard Dolan joined me on a chain gang, and the swag was never found.

"The following year I engineered a break and Dolan escaped with me. I tried to force him to tell me where he'd hidden the sixty G's but he refused and got away from me. I didn't see him again for more than twenty years, though I know that he married, had a daughter, lost his wife in childbirth and became a highly successful and respected New York banker.

"As for me, I came to California and became the Hollywood Hermit. That bearded character seemed the best possible disguise, and I was right.

"That brings us to the present. A week or so ago I discovered that a certain banker has been sent out here to take financial control of Magnificent Studios. He is Roger Faraday. But Roger Faraday is my old pal Leonard Dolan!"

Having read this far, I copped a squint at the cutie on the bed. "So your name is Faraday, eh?"

"Y-yes. I . . . I hate you, you heel."

"And the front handle?"

"Constance. You're a dirty despicable—"

"Flattery will get you nowhere, angel," I said. And turning my letter over, I read what Caffery had written on the other side:

"As soon as I saw Dolan-Faraday's picture in the newspaper I recognized him and got in touch with him by phone, asking him about the sixty thousand dollars which I stole and he hid back in Georgia. It seems he never notified the



authorities where to find it, fearing that such an action on his part might be traced to him and result in his re-arrest as an escaped con. This he couldn't risk, since he had spent years building up his new and respectable name and personality.

"You can see that I had no fear about contacting him, because he can't squeal on me unless he also squeals on himself. On the other hand, as I pointed out to him, I could turn him in without any risk to myself, because it would be perfectly simple for me to shave my beard and drop out of the Hollywood picture. After all, I have no social or professional position to maintain, as he has. I could go elsewhere and start all over again. I could live the rest of my life very comfortably indeed—if I had sixty thousand dollars.

"And that's the whole point. I'm not figuring to shake Faraday down for any money out of his own pocket. All I want him to do is tell me where he hid that sixty grand. That won't cost him a dime, but it will make me a rich man.

"Naturally, to force him to terms, I have had to threaten to expose his past. This is where you come in. There is a bare possibility that Faraday may get some silly idea of stooling on me, even though it would mean sacrificing himself. Or maybe he will try to shut me up permanently. Well, I don't want to go back to a chain gang and I don't want to be murdered either. So I'm going to lay low and let you handle the deal. You be the go-between. Get the information for me. I'll see that you're well paid.

*Rick Caffrey*"

**I** FINISHED reading the letter and stuck it in my pocket. "The damned fool," I said sourly. "He must have been nuts."

"Wh-what do you mean?" the Faraday doll blinked at me.

"I'm an ethical guy," I said. "Everybody knows that. I wouldn't handle a deal like this for all the coffee in Java."

"Why lie?" She made a bitter mouth.

"When Caffrey phoned dad, he told him you were going to be the go-between."

"He took too much for granted. I didn't even know what he wanted to hire me for. If he had braced me personally with any such stinking proposition I'd have busted his neck."

She narrowed her glimmers at me. "Maybe you did. Maybe that's exactly what happened. Maybe you killed him because he asked you to take part in something crooked."

"No, sweet stuff. That's fast theorising, but it's just wishful thinking. You can't yank your old gent out of the grease with that kind of hogwash."

"It isn't hogwash. You can't deny you asked Caffrey to go to your apartment in person tonight."

I said: "I did like hell. What gave you that screwy idea?"

"Something else I found in the waste basket," she retorted. "A message slip."

I blipped over to the corner, delved into the waste basket under discussion and came up with a rectangle of paper on which was written: *Mr. Caffrey. Please see Mr. Dan Turner at his apartment tonight between eleven-thirty and midnight.*

"Well, hell's bells and codfish balls!" I yodeled. "I never phoned any message like this. I didn't phone any message, period. If you want my opinion, this simply drives another nail in your father's coffin."

"Wh-wha-what--?"

I leaned down, unlocked the brackets that fastened her to the bedpost. "It's pretty obvious, hon. Your dad realized Caffrey had him by the short hairs. And Caffrey had told him I was to be the go-between. So he phoned this message to Caffrey, using my name; lured him to my stash and killed him there after first getting me out of the way with a bash on the wimple."

"You're wrong!" she wailed. "I know you're wrong!"

I ignored her. "Meanwhile, you got a homicidal notion of your own. You sneaked here to Caffrey's room and fig-

*(Continued on page 109)*



Those two screwball reporters had a splendid scoop figured out when they rescued that movie actress from the briny—but then there was sudden death complicating it!

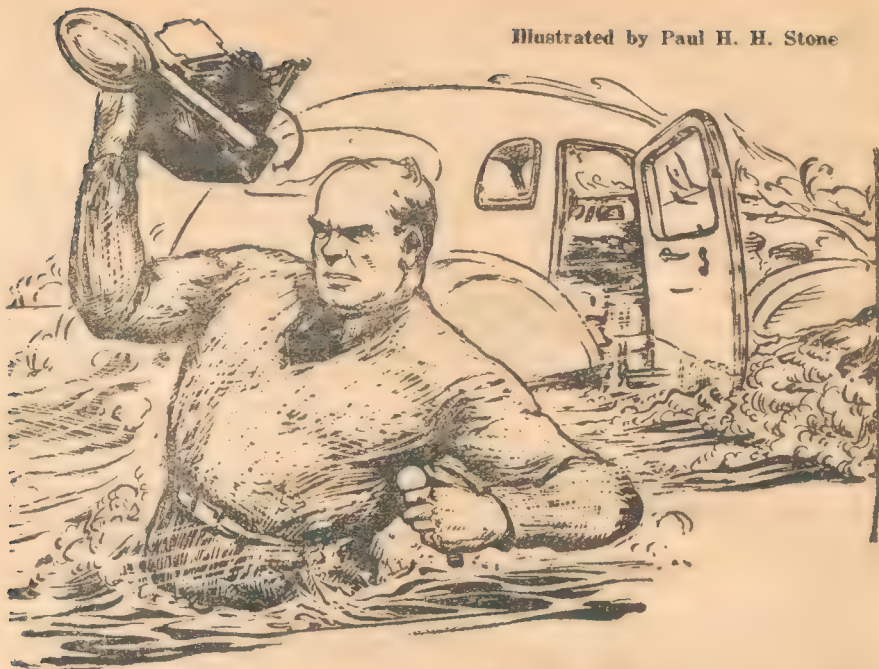
By  
**PAUL  
HANNA**



"It seems incredible, but she's alive!" Shag exclaimed. "Maybe there's a chance of saving her if we can make it to the hospital at Hermosa Beach." He carried her out of the water to the car.

# MURDER GOES SWIMMING





**I**T APPEARED that Lina Colter, a star of Eagle Films, Inc., had either met with a queer auto accident or had chosen the hard way to try suicide. Shag Conroy couldn't judge offhand which it had been. The movie-contact reporter for the *Hollywood Ledger* was driving the low hard road between Redondo Beach and a high rocky point that shut off a strip of deep, yellow sand.

Dawning light picked out the one and only red, white and blue coupe of the little actress who had imagined the violent color of her car proved she was patriotic. The car had been run off the road into the heavy sand perhaps some hours before when the incoming tide would almost submerge it.

Shag Conroy estimated the time from the position of the coupe in shallow water, now that the ebb tide was running out. Shag was swearing at the Fall rain storm that had almost obliterated the tire tracks of the car where it had left the paved roadway. The mist following the rain made the morning light blurry.

"But sure as the devil there's no burned rubber marks, and it looks as if

the coupe was deliberately turned into the rising tide at low speed," commented Shag as he bent his six feet of lean length to have a close look-see. "Anyway, Jake, we'll wade out to the car."

Jake Heffler, a plump, wheezing cameraman for the *Ledger*, emitted a doleful groan.

"Let's don't, Shag," pleaded Jake. "Leave us just drive on so as to catch that Farrell woman before she goes on the set. The old man's still talkin' to himself about that phony jewel robbery and the fake kidnaping you let the space hounds put over on the rag. The old man said you was to find out from her own lips if Farrell is gonna stage a lone strike or ain't she."

Shag Conroy grinned tightly at the fat photog. The "old man" was Joe Ward, the city editor, and he wasn't old. Shag had been ordered to see Ann Farrell and get the truth or not to come back to the *Ledger* office. Only the business of reaching the actress before her early morning work had put Shag and Jake Heffler on the Redondo Beach road at this unholy hour.



"Quit playin' dumb and come on, Jake!" snapped Shag, wading toward the conspicuous coupe where the tide lapped at its running boards. "I can't see if the Colter run-around is in that car or if it's empty."

**L**INA COLTER had as wild a streak as a one-time red-headed actress now out of the pictures for several years. Lina's starring career had been brief and Shag had heard the rumor that Eagle Inc. was ready to drop her contract.

Shivering in cold water to his waist, Shag guessed the rumor had been true. Lina Colter was slumped over the steering wheel and her synthetic yellow hair was stained by blood from her badly smashed face.

"That tide didn't reach her head, so she didn't drown," said Shag. "But bucking into that heavy sand would have been like hitting a stone wall. She was thrown into the windshield and then she fell back."

"Lordy!" moaned fat Jake. "Let's don't us touch her, Shag. The old man sent us to see Farrell."

"An' I suppose this side issue won't be a bigger story!" growled Shag. "You shoot a couple of pictures as she is. We're in luck there's been no fishermen stirrin' down here in the rain."

Jake muttered as he elevated his graflex. Jake was good but he never had learned to like gruesome jobs. Then suddenly he was relieved of snapping the shot.

"Hold it, Jake!" rapped out Shag.

Shag had lifted the girl's head from the steering wheel. He was acutely aware of Lina Colter's assets for making stardom, even if briefly. Nature has bestowed upon the actress all the proper curves, and hardboiled Shag reacted to a surge of pity for the girl's weakness that had been costing her her contract.

It wasn't this that caused Shag's quick shout. Although wet to the waist with cold sea water, Lina Colter's body was still soft and warm. Shag pushed back the dyed yellow hair, his ear to the girl's bosom.

"Quick, Jake!" exclaimed Shag. "Help

me lift her out of here. It seems incredible but she's alive. Maybe there's a chance of saving her if we can make it to the hospital at Hermosa Beach."

Jake's little eyes bugged out. He helped lift the girl and Shag carried her to the *Ledger* car.

Shag supported the girl in the rear seat of the sedan and Jake drove, grumbling that no good would come of this.

The high, piercing wail of a police car siren came from ahead. Jake's hands twitched nervously on the wheel. Shag hurriedly hauled a car blanket over Lina Colter, pushing her down close beside him.

Not one, but two cop cars racketed past, coming from the Redondo Beach precinct of the L. A. department. The first car slowed some, but the *Press* sticker on Shag's jalopy was recognized and the police sped by in the direction from which Shag had just brought Lina Colter.

"Lordy!" grunted Jake Heffler. "Why'n't you hold up and turn the babe over to the cops? They'll be nailin' us for tampering with evidence, leavin' the scene of an accident or stealin' a corpus delicti!"

"Step on it, Jake!" ordered Shag. "You're thicker'n mud. We don't grab the Farrell femme, but we've got a whale of an exclusive that'll make Joe Ward forget his nervous indigestion. *Movie Playgirl Tries Suicide*. The *Ledger* hasn't been getting any rake-off from Eagle Inc. This is peaches."

**I**N THE two-mile jump from Redondo to Hermosa Beach a gas station was open. Shag put Lina Colter safely under the blanket. He left Jake in the car with sweat running into his eyes.

In the public phone booth Shag called Joe Ward at his apartment, it being too early for the *Ledger* office.

Joe Ward's reply was like the growl of a starved bear after a hard Winter. Shag hastened to put his story across.

"Lookit, Joe!" he cut in. "Gotha a yarn that'll put the Farrell dame back on the want-ad page. It'll be exclus—"



Joe Ward's ironical voice chopped him off.

"To the devil with Farrell an' any other yarn you've got on your moronic mind!" cracked the old man. "Your call-in' in is just dumb luck. 'Horse Opera' Wheeler went for one o' his midnight



The contents of the purse included Lina Colter's movie-guild card and other definite identification.

swims, an' some o' his next of kin hauled him out of the pool dead only a few minutes ago. You drop everything else an' tear your pants up to Wheeler's million-dollar shack. Bein' half blind, maybe old Horse Opera hit his head divin', I said *maybe* he did—you see what's cookin' that the dumb Culver City cops can't smell—"

"But, Joe!" interrupted Shag. "Wheeler's a has-been left over from the silents of the Twenties, an' I've got an exclusive on Lina Colter, who's been headline stuff ever since she drove from Malibu Beach to L. A. dressed in nothing but the colors of her Super-special coupe. She's—"

Joe Ward put the editorial axe to Shag's idea.

"I'm expectin' a call to rewrite from Horse Opera's place in half an hour, an' more adds to the yarn every half hour after that!" rapped out the old man. "Horse Opera's rated at five or six millions, an' he's been playin' a fancy give-an'-take game with half a dozen heirs. All of 'em have been rooked in a gift play to make Tess Jones, a granddaughter, the winner now and in his final will. Call rewrite in half an hour."

"Listen, Joe—"

Shag swore. He was talking into a dead transmitter. The old man's slamming of his receiver cracked in his ear.

AS SHAG, swearing to himself, came back to the sedan, Jake Heffler was out, making as if fixing the carburator. Again the piercing siren of a police car screamed. Shag held his breath for this one was coming from the other direction.

Shag almost choked until the police car whizzed by with a brief glance at the press car and Jake Heffler. For a minute Shag had imagined Lina Colter's coupe had been found and the cops had seen Jake's and his own footprints in the sand. Then the police car whirled into the Culver City highway and Shag breathed again.

He judged the law was heading for San Ramos canyon and the architectural monstrosity of split logs and stucco that was known far and wide as Horse Opera Wheeler's shack.

"Holy hell, Jake!" exploded Shag. "We've gotta get this Colter dame to the Hermosa Beach hospital an' take to the hills. Joe Ward's tearin' his shirt over old Horse Opera Wheeler cracking his noggin in a midnight swim. The old man's hintin' Wheeler's been bumped by one



of his rapacious relatives, an' he wouldn't listen."

"Let's you do the drivin', Shag," pleaded Jake, his loose cheeks quivering. "I ain't feelin' so well, not havin' had any breakfast an' not even a drink."

Shag swore but nodded. Then he opened the door and lifted the blanket over Lina Colter. In the next few seconds Shag was getting sicker by the minute. The playgirl actress hadn't any pulse. She wasn't breathing.

Lina Colter was dead and all Shag could think of just then was that she had been smothered by the concealing blanket. He tried not to think of where the death of the actress put Shag Conroy.

Most of the Hollywood district cops didn't like him. They wouldn't like his removing a corpse, even. And if the shaky Jake Heffler happened to blurt out that the girl had been alive, that only made the spot he'd be on a little hotter.

"I'll drive, Jake," gritted Shag. "Climb in the back an' keep that blanket over the corpse."

Jake's fat knees knocked together and his teeth rattled.

"I thought you said corpse, Shag," he wailed.

"I said corpse," agreed Shag. "Get in there an' hang on. We're on our way to San Ramos canyon while I'm thinkin' my way out of this jam."

"Let us just put her back in the ocean an' make like we're quittin' the *Ledger* an' headin' out of L. A.," moaned Jake as Shag jerked the car into motion.

Shag did not reply. He hadn't thought a way out of this as he passed the big M.G.M. studio in Culver City. He was still thinking without result when he turned into a wide parking space close to Horse Opera Wheeler's mansion in San Ramos canyon.

**S**HAG CONROY pulled the smartest trick he could think of at the moment. In the parking space just below the towering log and stucco home of the late Horse Opera Wheeler, a dozen or more cars were drawn up in a row. Shag's

keen eyes spotted one police car and another black and official-looking auto.

Fat Jake Heffler's quivering body shook the sedan as Shag coolly pulled up and parked beside the police car. Before Jake could get his nervous tongue untwisted, Shag was out, running up the window and locking the driver's door.

"Get out, Jake," he ordered. "Shut the door and stick around. It isn't likely the cops or anyone else will be pryin' into a press car. Be shootin' a few pix an' you won't be noticed."

Jake nodded assent with his chin trembling.

"If anything happens, Jake," continued Shag, "you get to me quick!"

Leaving the most unhappy photog pacing back and forth along the parking strip, Shag went up openly to the broad tiled patio that ended in a big swimming pool. Shag was just in time to bump into Lawyer John Harper who happened to owe him several favors.

Shag stopped, to look at the group around the corpse which had been lifted onto a cot and covered with a sheet. Shag saw Captain Grogan of the Culver City precinct, and his skin prickled. Grogan also owed Shag something, but unlike Lawyer Harper, Grogan would be thinking how Shag had taken the hide off him in a very recent story in the *Ledger*.

In the group, besides the police and the medical examiner, were four men whom Shag marked particularly. There was a girl, too slick, too much made-up and too over-dressed for the occasion. She was a little blonde and she was snuggled close to the biggest of the four men whom Shag had noticed.

"What's the answers, Harper?" asked Shag addressing the lawyer. "You wouldn't be here unless there was a fee tacked on to it."

Harper gave Shag a pleasant grin and nodded. "You're right, Shag," he said. "I suppose nearly everyone knows how Horse Opera Wheeler figured out a way to favor one of his granddaughters and still keep four other heirs, also grandchildren, stringing along."





*Shag was a good swimmer, but with his legs in that vise-like grip he could not kick himself free, nor fight free.*

"I'd heard some of it," admitted Shag. "But first off, Harper, what's the M.E. say?"

Lawyer Harper frowned and hesitated.

"Looks to the doctor," he said, "as if the old man took a blind dive and struck his head on the wall. Gentry, the big

man there next to the slick doll, found Horse Opera dead in the shallow part of the pool this morning. Gentry's been the old man's nurse for three or four years back since Horse Opera was partly blind and suffered from acute insomnia."

"Yeah," commented Shag. "I've heard all about that. Back in the 20's the old fellow was a director of Western quickies of the old horse chase kind and he had to think up a new short story for his company six nights of the week. He made a few millions but it broke his mind and his health. The story is he hasn't slept

more than an hour at a time in a bed for several years."

"That's right," said Lawyer Harper. "Horse Opera's only sedative seemed to be a swim in the pool. He'd go out at odd times between midnight and morning when Gentry, his nurse, was asleep. It was one of the odd times this morning and the last time."

Shag saw that Captain Grogan was sending away several servants and he was questioning the two big men, the two half-pint guys, and the voluptuous blonde.

"Let me see," said Shag. "Besides the nurse, those other four must be the heirs."

"Yes," said Lawyer Harper. "The cute blonde and Randolph the big men and the two King brothers who are twins, are the old man's heirs who've been grinding their teeth the past couple of years over the cunning scheme Horse Opera worked out to start giving most of his fortune to Tess Jones, his favorite granddaughter."

**S**HAG nodded. He knew of Horse Opera's shrewd plan. For two years the old man had been making a gift of exactly five thousand dollars to each of his five heirs. That just came under the limit of the Government gift tax. The catch in it was that Horse Opera required all of the heirs to visit him at the time. Each of the four now being quizzed by Captain Grogan had to hand back to their cousin, Tess Jones, four thousand dollars. Thus each received one thousand dollars while Tess Jones really was made a gift in cash of a total of twenty-thousand dollars each year.

Lawyer Harper smiled at Shag with an ironical twist to his mouth.

"The final verdict on Horse Opera's death may be different," said Lawyer Harper. "I was called out here last night for the pleasant purpose of announcing to the four heirs you now see that the bulk of the old man's estate was being left to Tess Jones in his last will. It is more interesting because Horse Opera

had me draw up the will last night but he hadn't signed it."

"That tears it," commented Shag. "How about this Tess Jones? Is she here?"

"In the house, sort of looking after things," nodded Lawyer Harper. "She's been stayin' with Horse Opera three or four years. She's been doin' some extra bits on the movie lots to keep herself busy, but she's always here at night. Tess Jones hasn't any real or artificial glamour and that's probably why old Horse Opera favored her."

Shag walked on alone. Captain Grogan thrust out his undershot, bulldog jaw and growled when he saw him. Shag grinned. Two reporters from other papers swore under their breath.

Shag had a little habit of prying into the business of death by violence, murder or otherwise. Captain Grogan grunted.

"You, Conroy! Don't stick your long nose in too deep. I'll wise you to what's goin' on at the proper time."

"I've got my ticker set by *Ledger* edit-time, cap," replied Shag, still grinning. "Looks like you've got this one all wrapped up, huh?"

"Nothin' to it," growled Grogan. "Old Horse Opera took a dive in the dark and hit the shallow end of the swimming pool."

"Were you there, cap?" Shag's tone was flippant. "I hear there's a lot of murder motive you haven't got wrapped up."

"Okay, smart guy!" snapped Grogan. "You're welcome to look around an' ask questions enough for your scandal sheet, but don't try upsettin' a straight M. E. report."

Shag merely rubbed his chin, as the four heirs and Gentry, the male nurse, sized him up. The over-dressed blonde wasn't so cute this close. Shag had the history of the heirs from a past story.

The painted blonde was at an age where she was wearing some at the seams. Make-up couldn't quite hide the eye wrinkles and the petulant, frustrated droop of her rubied lips. This granddaughter was Vilma Stone and she was still trying, but had





*Many minutes passed before Shag recovered sufficiently to crawl to the stone steps near the lockers at the pool end.*

never made the front row of the chorus.

A man any man, was Vilma's objective. Just now she was clinging to the arm of the six-foot male nurse, Gentry. Shag noticed a defiant stare in Gentry's pale eyes. In his position it was apparent that Gentry was all set for any random suspicion, being the nurse and having found Horse Opera's body.

Shag's gaze flicked to Randolph, another six-foot, 200-pound chunk of a man. Shag had heard that Randolph dabbled in stocks, real estate, and other promotional activities. Randolph's black eyes were hard, but furtive, although he slouched carelessly.

The King twins were both baby-faced, little larger than midgets. Their hands and feet were small. Shag knew they had a small farm, but followed carnivals in season.

Shag ignored the sheeted form of Horse Opera Wheeler. He was remembered as a hollowed-eyed, gaunt old fellow, whose fight for sleep had pared him down to the bone.

SHAG turned abruptly, striding toward the nearest door of the Horse Opera mansion Captain Grogan hard-heeled after him.

"If you're wantin' to look around an' quiz the other heir, Tess Jones, I'm stickin' along," announced Grogan. "She's

all in the clear, seein' she'd want her grandpa to sign his latest will."

Shag nodded. The screen door opened. Shag took the slovenly-dressed woman inside to be one of the maids. Her mouse-colored hair was pulled into a knot. Her skirt sagged at the back below her knees and her legs showed no promise in black cotton stockings. The woman looked at Shag with dull eyes set in a face that lacked any makeup.

Shag instinctively started to give her his hat, when Grogan punched his ribs.

"She's Tess Jones, you dumb cluck," whispered Grogan.

"We'll go to grandpa's library," said the woman in a flat voice. "I don't know much to tell—"

She appeared to be repressing her inner grief. She turned and walked ahead. Shag found his interest quickening. With all of her drabness, Tess Jones moved with a graceful, lifting step on her toes.

Shag's memory stirred. He was seeing the proper assortment of feminine curves that the shapeless clothes could not hide. The dragging skirt and the bunched blouse failed to cover the lithe movement as she walked.

They had dropped behind, and it was Captain Grogan who spoke.

"I've a hunch I've seen that little dame before, an' she wasn't dressed that way," imparted Grogan.

Shag didn't admit he had the same feeling. He took in the girl's figure from the flat-heeled shoes to her knotted hair. His sharp eyes lingered here and there.

Something was building sharply in his mind. He held his eyes longest on the hands of Tess Jones. Evidently she had been helping about the house, sweeping and dusting.

"If she was stripped down now, that walk would be worth the watching," he replied, low-voiced to Captain Grogan.

Five minutes later Tess Jones told all she seemed to know of Horse Opera's demise. Her tone was still flat and was not at all what might have been expected of a girl who had come within one sudden death of inheriting a few millions.

The girl's eyes were half-lidded, but Shag imagined she was probing, studying him. Captain Grogan found little to question. Shag spoke suddenly, surprising Grogan.

"Sorry to have troubled you, Miss Jones," said Shag. "If I may use the phone, I've got a deadline to make."

Grogan stayed beside him as he talked to Joe Ward. Shag had Ward swearing over the lack of any color in the Horse Opera yarn. He said Shag was several adjectived kinds of a son, and ordered him to wake up and come up with better headline stuff.

Shag clicked upon the receiver. He felt in his coat pocket.

"Dammit! Left my pipe in the car," he said. "Guess you're right, Grogan, you've got this all wrapped up."

Grogan watched Shag go out, sticking around himself for a look-see at some of the late Horse Opera's western movie trophies.

**S**HAG CONROY made straight for the *Ledger* press car. He had an idea too wild to be credible. But it was something he wanted to know. He unlocked the car door and climbed inside. Making sure no one was observing him, he pulled the blanket from the body of Lina Colter, the movie star.

One glance started him swearing softly. He noted then the WAC shoulder

strap-style purse still in place. During the excitement of trying to save the girl's life, Shag had made no special effort to verify the identification.

Half a minute showed this now. The contents of the purse included Lina Colter's movie-guild card and other identification. Shag scowled, replacing the blanket over the body.

As he did this, he became aware of plump Jake Heffler. The fat photog was gesturing wildly, but trying to hide his frantic signals. Shag was chilled. He saw Captain Grogan and another copper coming toward the cars on the tiled patio. Shag groped hastily and found an old pipe in the car pocket.

Jake Heffler was scared green, but he was smart enough to put on one sure delaying act. Shag saw fat Jake step in front of Grogan and the other cop, lifting his Graflex. There never had been a time when the captain refused to have his ugly mug in the papers.

Jake was shaking, but he took his time. Grogan pushed the other copper back a little, making sure of a close-up for himself.

In the half minute of time, Shag tamped cigarette tobacco into the old pipe, stuck the bitter stem in his mouth, climbed from his car and locked the driver's door. Sweat beaded and ran into his eyes, but Shag was puffing malodorous smoke as he walked toward Jake Heffler and the cops.

**J**UST as Shag Conroy came up to Captain Grogan and the other cop, a sudden black dusk enveloped San Ramos canyon. A few huge drops pattered down. The rainstorm of the early morning was continuing. In the canyon, the clouds seemed almost at ground level with a terrifying darkness.

Captain Grogan and his fellow cop hotfooted it toward their police car for shelter. The body of Horse Opera Wheeler was being hurriedly carried inside the house.

Shag glanced at Jake Heffler's round face and it seemed as if the rain had already come and was running down Jake's



plump cheeks. Jake was sweating and almost speechless as he tucked his Graflex under his coat.

The canyon storm became blacker and



The thrown knife imbedded itself in the muscles above his right shoulder, then.

it was like night over Horse Opera's mansion and swimming pool. Shag saw that the heirs and others had darted through the door of the big house. The rain suddenly became solid sheets of water.

"Come on, Jake!" rasped Shag. "I'm wantin' a look at those bath lockers at the far end of the pool."

There were several of the little buildings that afforded shelter. When they were inside one, the canyon's cloudburst had cut visibility to only a few yards.

Beyond the upper end of the swimming pool, where Horse Opera had been found dead, was a steep hillside thicket of cactus, thorn bush, and stunted pawns, a veritable jungle that had never been cleared off, probably because it gave a touch of color to Horse Opera's canyon estate.

Jake was gibbering but Shag wasn't listening. Over toward the house, he saw movement so shadowy that it was impossible to determine the size or identity of the person moving in the blackness toward the hillside thicket.

"It has to be something damn' important to take anyone out this storm," grated Shag. "Stick here, Jake. I'll be back."

Shag had watched the dim shadow fade straight into the tangled thicket just above the swimming pool. Only a minute later Shag was swearing at the impeding thorn bush and cactus through which he wedged his way, trying to make as little noise as possible. Suddenly Shag paused. Whoever had preceded him hadn't gone many yards from the swimming pool.

Shag could hear the low muttering of a voice and even in the downpour and darkness, he could tell that the thick wilderness shrubbery was moving as if the person he had followed was hunting something.

Shag crouched and catfooted toward the other man, if it was a man. He freed the .38 he carried in a shoulder sling. He wasn't more than three or four yards from that other moving figure when a slight sound off to his left halted him.

The second individual he hadn't seen was moving stealthily through the cactus and thorn bush. It came to Shag that this was not an intended rendezvous, but the few seconds, during which he debated what move to make, suddenly was too late for Shag to act.

There was a man's agonized curse and a groan and a threshing about in the cactus. Throwing discretion away, Shag lunged forward with his gun held ready. The threshing sound died out. It had gone through Shag's mind that here was possibly his first definite chance at evidence proving that old Horse Opera had been murdered.

What would a man be looking for out here in the torrential rain? Might it be some weapon that had been hastily used and thrown without aim into the canyon brush?

The figure on the ground was indistinct. It had been in Shag's mind that the big man, Randolph, might be the most likely suspect. He had also thought of that other hulking man, Gentry, the male nurse, for he was convinced that old Horse Opera would have left the nurse at least a few thousand.

The almost shapeless figure was lying crumpled among the spiny cactus. The man was soaked and his clothes were shapeless in the rain. But Shag saw the gleaming white bone heft of a knife protruding from between his shoulder blades.

SHAG stood stock still, listening. He judged the killer must have moved away so quickly that he could no longer hear him. He bent over and lifted the man's head. He was looking at the dead face of Gentry, the male nurse.

Shag made a grievous mistake. He paused, trying to figure out why Gentry would have been looking for something and why another man should have struck him down. It was instinctive for Shag to go through Gentry's pockets. His hand encountered paper that appeared to be letters in his inside coat pocket.

So far as Shag knew after that for some time, it might have been lightning



that struck him with a terrific crash of thunder. He just did put out his hand, but he fell into a deep well of blackness and he was lying directly across the body of the murdered man.

SHAG CONROY ached in every muscle. The back of his neck felt as if someone had tried to chop off his head and hadn't missed it much. He had been the recipient of the old rabbit punch delivered by an expert.

Shag realized he had lain there for hours. The rain had long been over, but stars glittered in the sky. The muttering of voices came from the Horse Opera patio not so far away.

Shag identified the heavy voice of Captain Grogan. He was a few minutes remembering why he was here. Then he could feel the stiffened corpse of Gentry, the male nurse. Shag's hand went instinctively toward where he had seen the haft of a knife.

The blade had been removed by the person who had laid Shag cold. He crawled some distance before he could climb to his feet. Angry voices still sounded from below the dense thicket.

Shag's clothes were rain-soaked. Then in the darkness he achieved by dumb luck that which the dead Gentry, and probably his killer, had failed to do. His hand encountered a cold, round stake of iron such as gardeners use in transplanting.

The stake had fallen under an overhang of spiny cactus and thick brush. Shag fished out his soggy handkerchief. He used his cigarette lighter briefly. Near one end the iron stake was marked by dried blood and a few short, gray hairs.

With the stake under his coat, Shag slithered cautiously toward the sound of voices in the patio. He found his .38 was intact. His brain ached and his mind was a questioning turmoil.

He had been out for hours. It was simple to figure that the absence of the murdered Gentry would be accounted for. The police would believe he had powdered and there would be no reason to go searching the cactus jungle nearby.

"But Jake Heffler?" murmured Shag. "He hadn't a key to our car. He was scared stiff. With me missing, Jake might have been detained, or Captain Grogan might have grown curious and busted into the jalopy."

Shag reached the row of bath lockers, keeping to the end farthest from the patio. The door of the last locker was closed and locked with an iron hasp. For the moment Shag wanted to ditch the iron take that he was sure must be murder evidence.

A muffled, grunting noise came from behind the locked door of that last locker. On the other side of the swimming pool some police and other persons were moving back into the house.

Shag heard Captain Grogan's deep bass.

"It'd be like that damn' newshound to help Gentry get away so's he'd have a scoop!" said Grogan. "He left his car so's we wouldn't figure it out! I'll hold Conroy as an accessory—"

Despite his discomfort Shag grinned. Grogan followed others into the big house. Shag turned, snapped back the bolt of the door where he had heard the muffled groan.

His cigarette lighter showed Jake Heffler, tied securely, with his mouth taped shut. Shag slipped the iron stake into a corner of the scanty space and bent to free the tape from Jake's mouth.

Arms as strong as circling steel gripped Shag's legs. He was thrown to his face and dragged backward before he could resist. He saved his face as his hands were dragged across the cold tile around the swimming pool.

Shag had no chance to turn or even glimpse his attacker. He heard a slight splash and he clutched convulsively at the edge of the pool wall. His fingers slipped and the water closed over his face as instinct compelled him to draw in a long breath.

Shag was a good swimmer, but with his legs in that viselike grip he could not kick himself free. He doubled, twisting, trying to strike with his fists. The water cushioned his badly aimed blows and his

captor appeared to be as much at home under the surface as some deadly sea monster.

Although he freed his breath a little at a time, Shag's lungs seemed about to burst. The endurance of his attacker wasn't human. Then suddenly Shag's assailant let go of his legs, and with a darting stroke he was up and had his hands fastened in Shag's throat.

Shag was dizzied, fading out. But his hands went out and he trapped the other man's body. He had pictured the husky Randolph, the biggest man among the heirs, as his attacker. Shag's weakening arms encircled a small body, a little man whose strength was amazing.

**T**HIS man could be none other than one of the half-pint King twins. In the flash of a second, Shag recalled that the twins, who were known by the names of Andy and Archie, had been in some act of a carnival.

None but a professional diver could have rendered Shag helpless. His attacker suddenly jolted Shag's chin with the heel of his hand and Shag's opened mouth gulped water. Shag felt himself sinking to the bottom of the pool, barely conscious that the other man was on his way to the surface.

It seemed to Shag that he was at the bottom of the pool for long minutes, and there could be no hope. Actually it must have been but a second or two before a final resurgence of strength came to Shag, causing him to fight desperately because the air had left his lungs. How he drove himself upward with a final kick, Shag never would know.

Air struck into his lungs with agonizing pain and a million lights were bursting and blinding him. Next Shag was lying in the shallow end of the pool, supported by one wall, but with his face above water.

Many minutes passed now before Shag recovered sufficiently to crawl to the stone steps near the lockers. When he was out, Shag was quiet for many more minutes, while knifelike pains became numbed.

No person moved on the patio or around

the pool. Shag finally made his way slowly to the locker dressing room where he had been about to free Jake Heffler. The fat photographer was no longer there. The iron murder stake had been found and removed.

Another ten minutes passed before Shag could climb to shaky legs. His .38 was watersoaked and probably useless. It was comforting to have it though, as Shag finally staggered toward the house.

There was something he must do, but Shag was some time getting the fog out of his brain. Coming upon an outside phone booth in the row of lockers snapped Shag back to reasonable alertness.

Like a man in a dream he dialed the operator and got the number of Eagle Films, Inc. He risked his lighter again long enough to dial the Eagle. He had some underling working at night and Shag asked but one question.

The reply was prompt, and Shag's informant wanted to know who was talking. Shag hung up without replying. He walked straighter now as he came to the Horse Opera house. He had found out what he needed to play a sheer bluff to trap what he knew to be a pair of killers.

**C**APTAIN GROGAN took a quick step toward Shag Conroy as he entered the high-ceilinged living room of the late Horse Opera Wheeler. But Grogan halted when he noted Shag's weakened condition.

Shag's clothes dripped water and one of his eyes was partly closed. He didn't appear to be able to stand long, but he held the blue-steel .38 across his stomach to steady his hand.

"Keep your shirt on, Grogan," said Shag evenly. "If you're thinkin' of hookin' me up with the missing nurse, Gentry, you can guess again. Gentry is not more than a hundred yards from where we're standin' and he'll stay there until the meat wagon comes. Someone shoved a shiv between his shoulders."

Captain Grogan swore vehemently and directed two of his coppers to go have a look-see.

"You've got questions to answer, Shag



Conroy," snapped Grogan. "Where've you been?"

"Shaking hands with the ferryman who runs the boat across the river Styx," said Shag without change in tone.

There was a little scream. The faded blonde, Vilma, picked out that moment to pass out. The drably clad girl, known as Tess Jones, hurried to her side. Shag looked rather odd the way his unclosed eye shifted from the big figure of Randolph, the promoter, to the pair of baby-faced, blue-eyed King twins, Andy and Archy. The twins looked alike, they were dressed alike, their sleek black hair was combed back and nothing about them betokened other than a passing interest in any violence that Shag Conroy might have passed through.

Grogan said: "It don't go, Shag. You'll tell what you know under the big light."

Shag Conroy merely shook his head.

"I'll tell what I know, now," he said flatly.

His eye studied the innocent gaze of the half-pint twins. Then Shag turned slightly toward Tess Jones, who, bending over the prostrated blonde, was displaying a wonderful pair of legs, considering the shapeless skirt that had concealed them.

Shag had judged correctly that the police had not interfered with his parked car. His voice was suddenly bitter and his words whipped out like a lash across the room.

"Lina Colter, Eagle Films has your fingerprints! I have sent for them."

He waited, dividing the attention of his one good eye between the King twins and this Tess Jones.

Beyond the sudden, unmistakable jerking of her shoulders, the girl gave his words no attention. One of the twins shifted a foot as if about to take a step forward but stopped.

"What the hell you getting at Shag?" growled Captain Grogan. "And what's Lina Colter got to do with all this? Her car was found at Redondo Beach and, like as not, her body is in the ocean."

Shag's voice was unusually soft. He

said: "Lina Colter couldn't be in the ocean and in this room at the same time. And Tess Jones couldn't be—"

Grogan rapped out a command to two of his men: "Hold him! He won't use that rod. He's gone off his nut!"

Shag's hand moved ever so slightly and the blue-steel .38, useless or otherwise, centered upon Captain Grogan.

"I wouldn't want to break your leg," observed Shag.

The girl known as Tess Jones had straightened and slightly turned and her white face, lacking makeup, had turned a shade whiter.

"How's it come, Miss Jones," said Shag casually, "that you're here and Tess Jones is dead out there in the back of my car? She's been there all day."

The girl pulled in a quick breath that brought her curves prominently to view under her faded blouse.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said, spacing her words.

SHAG'S eye centered upon the King twins from whom he hadn't as yet brought a spark. The big fellow, Randolph, uttered an oath.

"What's the idea of talking crazy, Conroy?" demanded Randolph. "All of us know Tess Jones. Even if she was getting the best of old Horse Opera's fortune, she's been earning it."

"Tess Jones did earn it," agreed Shag casually. "Her hands are rough and calloused and her fingernails are broken where she helped take care of old Horse Opera's house, sweeping, washing dishes, seeing that the old man was cared for."

That tore it. In spite of herself, for all the control she had exhibited, the girl known as Tess Jones jerked up her hands, looked at them and tried to put them down again before it was noticed.

Shag laughed and there was a hard, brittle note in his voice.

"That's one little thing, Lina Colter," he said with clipped words, "you should have noticed. Tess Jones worked on the lot as your stand-in to find a little excitement in life. But she couldn't keep her

hands soft and her nails manicured like yours."

"Damn it, Shag!" Captain Grogan exploded. "Come out with all of it!"

Shag knew the value of suspense and he didn't speak for a long half minute. He just stood there, shifting his one unclosed eye from Randolph to the King twins and back to the girl who had said she was Tess Jones.

"You want it all, Captain Grogan," he said. "Here it is. I'm accusin' the girl you are looking at, Lina Colter, of the attempted murder of the real Tess Jones, which became a murder when Tess Jones died in my car on the way here from Redondo Beach. I'm demanding the arrest of this girl, Lina Colter, for this murder and conspiracy in the murder of Horse Opera Wheeler.

"The Eagle Film's fingerprints will prove her identity. It probably will be shown she was married contrary to the terms of her contract. I think her husband is here in this room and too yellow to save her—"

One of the King twins, later identified as Andy, moved with the speed of a trained fighter. His right hand flashed and there was a gleam of flying steel. The point of his throwing knife missed Shag Conroy's throat but was imbedded in the muscles above his right shoulder.

The girl who had been known as Tess Jones had a bright little automatic that came from the folds of her blouse. She fired even as Shag snapped the hammer of his water-soaked .38 on a useless shall.

The slug from the girl's gun passed so close it ruffled Shag's hair. For the second time the hammer of his own gun dropped with only a click.

Shag dropped back, hurling the gun into the face of the knife-wielding twin, Andy King. The blow brought only an animal snarl from the twin's throat. He had another knife in his hand and he drove Shag to his knees as Shag evaded the blade aimed at his throat.

The phony Tess Jones was moving lithely to one side because the King twin was between her and Shag. Captain Gro-

gan at last launched himself forward striking at the girl's gun hand with his flat palm and jolting her off balance.

Andy King was a mite of a man compared to lanky Shag Conroy, but Shag was close to the end of his reserve strength. He had only enough grip left to seize the twin's wrist and fight the knife from reaching him.

Just as he had been unbeatable in the water, Andy King proved he knew all the tricks of fighting close in. He jammed Shag's head back with his free hand under his chin. He brought up one knee in Shag's stomach with sickening effect.

Shag could not even see the two coppers who had tried to interfere. The room and all in it was becoming a whirling confusion of darkness. Shag's last vestige of strength was fading out.

Roaring, wheezing oaths burst out from the doorway. Fat Jake Heffler, his mouth bleeding where he had torn off gagging tape, charged into the room. All of the fat photog's previous fear seemed to have exploded in a burst of insane fury. The coppers tried to grab him, but Jake was swinging an iron garden stake with berserk lack of aim.

Shag, going down with Andy King's knife being forced toward his throat, heard the crunching of metal on bone. The knife-wielder wilted and rolled to one side.

Ten seconds later the coppers were holding Jake Heffler and the fat man was crying, tears streaming down his plump cheeks.

Her gun wrested from her, the girl who had passed herself off as Tess Jones threw herself to her knees, clasping the dying Andy King in her arms. Her words left no doubt that this one of the twins had been her husband.

**S**HAG CONROY was talking after a reviving bracer.

"Eagle Films was about to cancel Lina Colter's contract, having learned she was married. The actress had become acquainted with the real Tess Jones. Moreover, she knew through her husband of



the fortune Tess Jones would inherit. Lina Colter had married Andy King when they were both with a carnival.

"No doubt Andy King and the girl knocked out Tess Jones, made her up and dressed her. They must have run the car into the ocean at low tide, failing to figure that the coming rise was only the sun tide and less than half of the moon flood that would come later.

"With the changing of the will and Lina Colter's impersonation of Tess Jones, old Horse Opera Wheeler had to die. None of them knew whether Horse Opera had signed the new will leaving everything to Tess Jones. But Lina and her husband stood to win either way. Andy King, as an heir, would receive a generous slice of the fortune. If the will had been signed, and Lawyer Harper didn't tell them one way or the other,

Lina Colter, as Tess Jones, would have received the bulk of the estate.

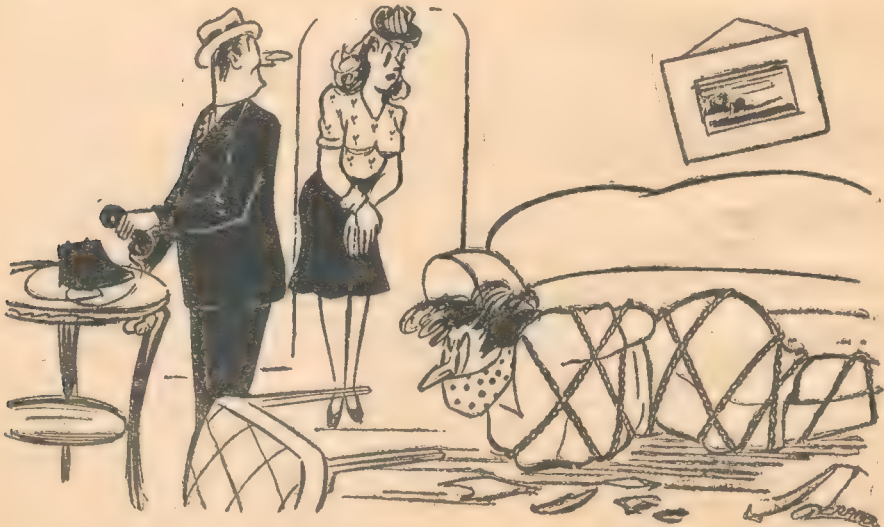
"I think Gentry, the nurse, saw Horse Opera struck from behind and sent to his death in the pool. He also saw the killer throw his weapon into the cactus thicket. Gentry probably wanted that evidence before he stuck his chin out. And perhaps, like myself, he couldn't be sure which of the King twins he had seen at the pool."

Captain Grogan's bulldog face was one big scowl.

"There'd ought to be something I could hold you for, Shag Conroy," he exploded. "But damn' if I can figure out what."

Shag grinned ruefully.

"That's right, Grogan," said Shag in a tight voice. "There isn't anything you can do but I've still gotta call Joe Ward and he'll think of plenty."



"We'll have to leave your mother tied up until the police arrive—I read in **SPEED DETECTIVE** that you're not supposed to destroy fingerprints."

# The Riddle Thumbs A Ride



**By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM**

*The beauteous bride of that aging flicker star had a good sound reason for hitch-hiking, all right—but when she picked Dan Turner's car for that lift she thereby led him into one of the locoedest killery setups ever to run wild even in movietown!*

**I**T WAS raining cats and billygoats as I headed for home after attending a sneak preview at one of the Pasadena movie palaces. I wheeled west on Colorado Boulevard, crossed the gracefully curved Suicide Bridge and made the double turn which leads into the wide straightaway stretch past the Annandale Country Club golf course.

Just before you go by the golf course you pass a side road on the right, leading

up into the hills. And as my headlights cut gashes in the pouring midnight at this intersection, a filly frantically flagged me down.

She was a bedraggled specimen, drenched to the rind and liberally daubed with mud as if she'd been playing squat tag in a cranberry bog. But the soggy frock that clung to her contours looked expensive despite its ruined condition, and the jane it contained had the brand





*I dealt him a dynamite left hook that landed with a jolting thud and nearly dislocated my arm.*

of shape that gloms beauty contests. Her legs were tapered and dainty in the wreckage of sheer nylons, her hips were lilting, her waist slender and her hair was soaking red. Streaks of mud marred her map but you knew it was pretty; it had to be to go with the way she was stacked up.

The instant I lamped her waving at me I tossed out my anchors, skidded my jalopy to a halt ferninst her and opened the right-hand door. "Trouble, toots?" I asked.

She quavered: "Y-yes. My car's got a flat t-tire and the spare hasn't any air in it and . . . and. . ." She swayed a little, and her teeth began to chatter like dice in a bucket. "I t-tried to use the jack and I fell down in the d-ditch and hurt myself, and I'm c-cold. . . ." Her knees almost buckled.

"Hey, hold on!" I said. "Get in here

out of the rain. You're flirting with pneumonia. Come on, hon. In."

"I . . . I'll get your upholstery all w-wet."

"So it'll get dry again when the sun shines," I told her. "According to the Chamber of Commerce that's bound to happen, sooner or later. The sun shining, I mean. Climb aboard, kitten."

She obeyed; huddled alongside me, shivering like a cat coughing brickbats. "I d-don't know how to thank you. If I could have f-found a taxi, or—"

"At this hour of the night taxi drivers go back under their rocks," I said. "Especially during a storm. Where would you like me to take you?"

Her tone combined hesitancy and misery. "I . . . I live in Hollywood. But I couldn't th-think of asking you to drive that f-far . . . maybe I can find a cab in Glendale."

"Why bother to stop in Glendale? I live in Hollywood, too," I told her. "Dan Turner is the handle." I deliberately neglected to add that I was a private gumshoe because sometimes that makes people

self-conscious, clogs up their conversation. Any time you say you're a dick or a fly cop the average person automatically classifies you among the freaks. Maybe they've got something there.

The red-haired cupcake said: "Are y-you sure?"

"You mean am I sure my monicker is Dan Turner? Well, I haven't got my birth certificate with me, but—"

"I mean are you sure you live in Hollywood?" She smiled faintly through the mud on her mush. "I don't want you to drive so far if it's out of your way."

I tooted my wagon down the long curving hill that takes you into Eagle Rock. "It's not out of my way at all, it's directly in my line of flight. Just mention your address and I'll have you home in a jiffy."

She gave me a residential-street number out toward Beverly, a few blocks this side of the boundary, and added: "I'm Connie Macklin."

"Not Mrs. Tim Macklin by any chance?"

"Why, y-yes. Do you know Tim?"

I shook my head. "Only from seeing him in the galloping snapshots," I said; and I did mean galloping.

**T**IM MACKLIN was one of the biggest cowboy stars on the roster of Paratone Pix, a rootin', tootin' two-gun buckaroo whose horse operas had been a standard studio product since away back in the silent days and still coined copious geetus at the box office. His first wife had died several years ago and he'd married this second one only recently, an October-and-June romance which most of the gossip columnists said would crack up in a hurry because the new bride was young enough to be his daughter. In fact, Macklin actually had a daughter practically the same age.

The tattle scribblers had been wrong, though, in forecasting that Macklin's second marriage would soon go on the reefs. Seven or eight months had gone by and the honeymoon happiness persisted; or at least that was what you heard along the Sunset Strip where everybody knows

everything about everybody else. But when I took a sidewise gander at the cupcake sitting by me I had a sudden ugly hunch that Macklin's marital bliss might come a cropper, after all. What I had on my hands was a redhead with the shakes; a jane who looked as if she might soon be needing an oxygen tent.

"I'm so c-cold!" she whimpered.

"Open the dashboard glove compartment in front of you," I said. "There's a fifth of Vat 69 in there. Take a snort of it."

"But . . . b-but I—"

I reached over, opened the compartment myself and got out the Scotch remedy, poked it at her. We were crossing Glendale's main stem by this time. "Belay the arguments, baby. Pour some medicine down the hatch. Good for snake-bite, chilblains and fallen arches, not to mention leprosy and pernicious anemia."

"But Tim d-doesn't like me to d-drink. I mean if he smells it on my b-breath he might misunderstand . . . he might think I've been out on a p-party with . . . with y-you."

I said: "That's plain damn ridiculous. If he gets any nutty notions like that I'll soon disillusion him. Now gargle a snifter and be quick about it."

Reluctantly she uncorked the fifth, lifted it to her flaccid kisser. The bottle's glass neck rattled against her grinders but she managed to slosh a generous jorum past her tonsils. To show her I was congenial I then helped myself to a similar prescription and chased it with another; there's something about Scotch that always makes me thirsty when it's around. A conditioned reflex, maybe.

"Feel better, hon?" I asked as I made the right turn off Chevy Chase into Los Feliz.

She nodded. "A little w-warmer."

"You'll be okay after a hot bath and a dry session in the feathers," I assured her, although secretly I didn't feel too positive about it. She'd had a lot of exposure to the weather and she wasn't the robust type. I set fire to a pair of gaspers, extended one of them toward her. "Smoke?"



She didn't take it; didn't answer. Out of the tail of my glim I saw that she was slumped down in the seat, limp and relaxed; too relaxed. She was either asleep or had passed out, I couldn't tell which; but I knew her condition was my cue to pour on the coal and make knots.

I souped my cylinders, clattered down the Western Avenue grade; swung right on Franklin and then cut over Cahuenga to Sunset Boulevard. The streets were awash with rain but barren of traffic and I nudged my speedometer up to sixty without much risk of encountering motorcycle-cop trouble. Not that it would have made any difference; I was on an emergency run now and I didn't care who knew it.

A FEW blocks this side of the county strip I located the residential side-street I wanted and turned in on two wheels and a miracle. Presently I spotted the Macklin stash, a hefty two-story tepee dating back to the pre-modernistic era when movie stars went in for Georgian Colonial architecture, substantial instead of gaudy.

The joint was set back on a terraced knoll, surrounded by formal flower gardens and a rolling, close-cropped lawn bisected by the upward-slanting ribbon of a concrete driveway. This led under a porte-cochere festooning the side of the house proper, then continued on back to a detached garage combined with servants' quarters built in the style of an old-fashioned stable and coach barn, the kind that used to go with Southern plantations. That was what the whole layout reminded me of: a Civil War set from *The Birth of a Nation*. All it needed was a few slaves, a bale or two of cotton, a banjo and some mint juleps to make the picture complete.

I coasted up the tilted drive, parked under the porte-cochere and said: "Time to change trains, sis."

The mud-daubed doll didn't speak, didn't stir. When I shook her she was as limber as cooked spaghetti. I whispered to myself: "This calls for measures." For an instant I considered lifting her out



*She was a bedraggled specimen, this filly who frantically flagged me down.*

of the coupe and toting her inside; then I realized I would have to ring the doorbell first, which might be difficult with my arms full of unconscious she-male. I concluded that this was a situation requiring help.

A quick dash through the rain brought me around front to the stately colonnaded portico. It also got me drenched to the scuppers. Perversely enough, the moment I gained the shelter of that front portico it stopped raining, suddenly and completely, as if somebody had shut off a spigot. Storms sometimes act that way in California, although the travel folders never mention it. Pretty soon, of course, the downpour would start again; but as long as it was going to take a brief vacation, why couldn't it have been when I was leaping from my jalopy to the front portal? At least that would have saved me a soaking.

Annoyed, I jingled the bell-push. Nothing happened so I gave it another shove. All around me was utter silence, intensi-

fied because the rain had been so noisy an instant before. All you could hear was a distant roaring gurgle of run-off water cataracting down a sewer drain, the nearer rustle of rose bushes shedding excess moisture and a steady *drip-drip-drip* from the eaves of the house itself. I thumbed the bell a third time.

Lights came on, inside.

It took a long while, though, before the door opened in front of me. Then I found myself facing Tim Macklin in person.

He peered at me. "Yes?"

ON the screen he was a tough, well-preserved cowpoke who rode and fought like a youngster; but in real life and just roused out of his blankets he looked his real age, which was about fifty. Minus makeup the wrinkles showed in his leathery puss, there was frost in his thinning hair and he packed a paunch under his pajamas. "Yes?" he repeated.

I said: "Sorry to bother you, pal, but I've got your wife in my chariot and I'm afraid she's passed out. How's for helping me lug her indoors?"

"My . . . my wife?"

"Yeah."

"Connie?"

"Yeah."

"But . . . but—"

"Look," I said. "We can talk about it later. Right now she's in need of first-aid; otherwise she's likely to kick the bucket. Come on, let's go get her."

He mumbled: "I don't understand this. I don't understand any part of it." Just the same he tailed me as I ankled off the portico and around the corner of the wigwam, thereby proving I had at least aroused his curiosity.

En route to the side of his stash I gave him a quick briefing on the scenario up to that point: told him how his frau had flagged me down as I was driving past the Annandale golf acreage, how I'd offered her a lift and forced her to partake of some alcoholic nourishment. "Then she folded on me," I finished. "It could be exhaustion, it could be pneumonia, it might even be that she wasn't used to

Scotch and got suddenly taken drunk. We'll see when she's in the house and comfortable."

"Yes," the cowboy hambo said. "We'll see." Then he opened the door of my kettle and gasped: "Oh, my God—!" He staggered back as if he'd been sandbagged.

I didn't blame him when I copped a slant over his shoulder. I felt like staggering, myself. The red-haired Macklin muffin was exactly where I'd left her, slumped down in the seat; but with a terrific difference. Some sharp apple had shot her through the breast at close range with a small-bore shotgun, blown a hole in her big enough to put your fist in. She was clammy to the touch and deader than a smoked herring.

## CHAPTER II

### *Pernicious Puzzle*

FROM a murderer's standpoint there's always one advantage to a shotgun kill: It makes monkeys of the ballistics experts, plays hell with scientific detection. A pistol or a rifle can be traced by the markings left on the bullet in its passage through and expulsion from the barrel; but birdshot can't be identified, can't be matched up with the weapon that fired it. Given similar grain-weight of powder charges, and using the same size pellets, a dozen different shotguns will make target patterns that are practically identical. A pattern spreads, of course, the farther the gun is from the object aimed at; but in a murder case the only thing this tells you is how close the victim was to the muzzle when the trigger was pulled—or how far away. The closer the gun the smaller and deadlier the hole.

With the Macklin cupcake, two very obvious signs showed that the killer had rammed his fowling-piece smack-dab against her brisket before he blasted. First, the wound was just about fist-size; second, there were powder-flash burns scorching the cloth of her rain-soaked frock. I tabbed some other things, too, but I didn't get a chance to mention them.



Not right then, anyhow.

That was because Tim Macklin blew his top, flew apart like a hockshop alarm clock. "She's d-dead!" he squalled. "Connie's dead . . . murdered! . . . She's . . . oh, heaven, she's—"

"Take it easy," I grabbed at him. "This is no time for hysterics. We've got to—"

He yowled: "You inhuman monster, Connie's dead! *Dead!* She's dead and you stand there telling me to take it easy! Damn your dirty stinking soul, you bring me my w-wife's corpse and then have the gall to say it's no time for hysterics! You rat, I'll kill you!"

He jumped me.

It was quite a fracas while it lasted. Suddenly the low black clouds overhead opened up and began deluging the landscape with a rainfall which Cecil B. De-Paramount himself would have been proud to produce; and as this teeming downpour commenced, Macklin swung a mighty haymaker at my favorite dewlaps. I ducked, slipped on a chunk of gooey mud and fell spang into the punch; took it full on the button. Spotlights erupted in front of my peepers, a thunderclap deafened my ears and I drooled a mouthful of gold inlays jarred from their cavities by the force of the wallop.

Down I toppled, but not to stay down; pride and egotism prevented that. If it ever got out that I'd been stiffened by a blister in his fifties the laugh would drive me out of Hollywood and into retirement, a glum prospect I didn't relish.

**B**Y the same token, it would be no feather in my cap to boast of a triumph over an elderly bozo like Tim Macklin. Despite his heroism on the screen there was too much difference in our ages; if I hung a kayo on him I'd be accused of picking on the feeble. He wasn't really feeble; not by a hell of a sight. He could punch like a battering-ram and he matched my hundred and ninety pounds, my six-feet-plus of height. Taking it all into consideration, however, I couldn't win—no matter how the brawl turned out. If I got licked, my rep would be

ruined; and yet if I whipped him I'd be a heel.

I came up off the concrete driveway, crouching, defending myself. "Now just a minute!" I caterwauled. "Let's talk this over."

"Talk hell!" he said, and thumped me on the noggin. Evidently this hurt his knuckles, because he let out an oath and backed off a few inches. I straightened from my crouch, dusted him lightly on the dimple and dumped him on his duff; if I hadn't pulled most of the steam from the uppercut he'd have gone out like a candle in a gale. While he was floundering on the back of his lap I circled him, clamped hold of him from behind, pinned his arms to his sides and lifted him upright by main strength.

"Now be reasonable," I panted. "I don't want to hurt—"

That was as far as I got. From around the rear of the house a pair of newcomers joined the festivities, took command of the battlefield. First to appear was Macklin's daughter Cynthia, a toothsome brunette cupcake shaped like a bachelor's dream and garbed in a gossamer negligee which had got thoroughly plastered to her luscious configurations during her dash through the downpour from the back door to the porte-cochere. Directly behind this gorgeous morsel came her hubby, a tall and wispy Britisher named Cedric Blessmere, who sometimes worked as a studio scenarist when not sponging on his father-in-law. Blessmere had curly yellow hair, a mustache to match and a Webley automatic in his right mitt.

When the brunette wren piped Macklin squirming in my clutches she yodeled: "Daddy, what's he doing to you?" and leaped at me in a furious flurry; climbed my back like a cat going up a tree. The next instant she was sailing through the storm, neck over tincup; I'd shrugged her off. To accomplish it, though, I'd had to let go my grip on her father. He whirled, pasted me on the complexion. I lurched drunkenly backward and fetched up against the hardness of Cedric Blessmere's roscoe.



*"I say, old boy, not quite so impetuous," Cedric murmured. Then he whanged me across the steeple with the butt of his Webley roscoe.*

"Okay," I said wearily. "I know when I'm outnumbered."

The Britisher said: "And a jolly good thing, old fruit. May I ask what this is all about? Cynthia and I heard a commotion, and here we find . . . er, I say, just what have we found?" he added adenoidally.

"Murder!" Tim Macklin supplied the answer.

"Murder?" his brunette daughter gasped. Then she gandered the corpse in my jalopy and gave issue to a horrified bleat. "Aieeek! It's . . . it's Connie! She's dead!"

Blessmere rammed his rod harder against my kidneys. "Connie?" he choked. "Dead?"

"Shot," Macklin told him shrilly. "And this rat you've got covered is the killer! He rang the front doorbell and told me he had her in his car, and when he showed her to me she . . . she—give me that pistol and I'll blow his dirty heart out! I'll fix him so the law won't have to execute him!"

I tensed; felt my nerves twanging like plucked catgut. "If all you damned fools will shut up and listen I'll explain everything! In the first place I'm no murderer;





I'm a private snoop. The name is Dan Turner; maybe you've heard of me."

"Perhaps we have." The Briton behind me spoke into my ear. "I dare say you're probably notorious. But what has that to do with the . . . er . . . corpse in your car?"

"Plenty. I'm trying to demonstrate I didn't bump her; I wouldn't have had any motive. She and I were total strangers."

"Connie was not the sort who rides with total strangers," Cynthia horned in. "If she was with you she knew you. Intimately, most likely," she added with a spiteful sneer.

THE dialogue was getting out of hand and I was tired of standing around arguing in the rain. "Look," I said. "Before we summon the law let's get this cleared up once and for all. Mrs. Macklin thumbed me for a ride over toward Pasadena. I ferried her home. A few blocks before we got here she passed out cold. I parked under this shelter, barged around front, rang the doorbell; left her lying huddled on the seat. When Mr. Macklin and I came back to the coupe the dame was defunct with a charge of buckshot through her bosom."

The elderly cowboy star glared at me.

"I've just touched her. She's cold."

"Deceased people get that way," I said callously.

"But not in five minutes," he retorted. "According to you, it would seem she was shot between the time you left her in your car and the time you got me out of the house, led me around here under the porte-cochere."

I nodded. "Naturally that must have been when it happened. If she was alive when I left her and dead when we got back—"

"Wait," he cut in. "Tell me about the shot."

"What do you mean?"

"The report," he said grimly. "The noise. I didn't hear a gun go off, did you?"

It began to dawn on me what he was driving at. "No," I admitted. "Come to think of it, there wasn't any explosion. And there should have been."

"Maybe you're going to suggest the shotgun had a silencer attachment?"

I felt my pan getting red in the rainy darkness. I knew quite well you can't silence a shotgun; it's one firearm impossible to muffle. And yet there had been no sound during the few minutes I'd been away from my bucket; even the storm had let up temporarily, and the night had been uncannily quiet. Then how had Macklin's wife been blasted? And why was she corpse-cold now when she'd been alive a mere ten minutes ago?

Macklin said: "So you haven't got any answers."

"All I know is—"

"Stop lying!" he snarled. "The truth is, you murdered her somewhere else and then brought her home."

I felt the short hairs prickling at the nape of my neck. "That isn't so! I tell you she thumbed a ride—"

"With her chest blown open?"

The idea festooned me with goose bumps big enough to hang a picture on. Dead janes don't thumb rides—but Connie Macklin had. Was it possible that I'd played Good Samaritan to a walking cadaver? I was plenty jittery.

Macklin's curvaceous daughter delivered herself of a sardonic, brittle laugh. "I think you and my stepmother were probably having a tryst. You got into a quarrel with her and shot her."

"Now cut that out!" I yeepled, and took a step toward her.

The step was a mistake. Cedric Blessmere murmured: "I say, old boy, not quite so impetuous." Then he whanged me across the steeple with the butt of his Webley; teed off and knocked me plumb to dreamland. Blackness gulped me like a raw oyster.

## CHAPTER III

### *Reversed Pursuit*

**M**Y throbbing noggin was swathed in bandages when I woke up fifteen minutes later, and I smelled as antiseptic as a hospital ward. I was inside the Macklin mansion, the joint was infested with cops, an ambulance interne had just finished soaking me with germicide and I was being firmly jostled back to consciousness by my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad.

"Snap out of it, fireball," Dave growled menacingly. "Time to quit playing possum and face the music."

I blinked my peepers open, stared foggily into his beefy mush. "You, eh? The Macklin tribe must have phoned in the squeal."

"They did indeed, and handed me the guilty guy on a platter." He poked me on the chest with a weighty forefinger. "And I do mean you."

I staggered from horizontal to perpendicular, grabbed hold of his lapels for support and yammered: "Don't be a dope, you idiot! Why the hell should I pick up a strange jessie in the rain and deliberately abolish her for no reason? That's a lot of hogwash and you know it."

"I don't know anything."

"That I'll buy," I sneered bitterly. Then I said: "Listen, do me a favor. Let me tell you exactly what happened—"

"I already know what you claim hap-



pened." He gestured across the room to where Tim Macklin was standing with his brunette daughter and her British hubby. "They told me all about the dizzy story you tried to sell them."

"And you don't believe it, hunh?"

"No."

I said: "Then I'm arrested?"

"Yeah."

"You're taking me down to the gow?"

"Pronto."

"That's just dandy," I said. "I've always wanted to sue a cop and a movie star. This is going to cost that Macklin hambo a hunk of geetus and lose you your badge."

"Oh, yeah?" Dave sounded a little uneasy. "How come?"

I ticked the charges off with my fingers. "False arrest. Defamation of character. Slander. Libel, because it'll be printed in a smear of headlines from hell to Havana. Illegal detention. Damage to my professional standing. And assault with a deadly weapon," I tacked on, rubbing the back of my conk where there was a swelling the size of a hockey puck.

That got Cedric Blessmere, whose Web-ley automatic had festooned the knot on my thatch. "Oh, now, I say, old thing," he bleated through his adenoids. "It won't do you any good to sue me, y'know. I'm a pauper. Living with my wife's father and all that rot. Haven't sold a scenario in months."

"You should have thought of that," I snarled nastily. "Nobody maces me without paying for it."

**C**EDRIC'S daddy-in-law wasn't impressed. "Pay no attention to Turner," the cowboy hambo said curtly. "He won't bring any suits. Not from the lethal chamber."

"You really think I cooled your wife, do you?" I growled.

"Yes, I do."

I said: "Suppose I convince you that you're wrong?"

"You can't."

Dave Donaldson stirred restlessly.



*I disguised my voice in a growl. "This is Lieutenant Donaldson," I lied to the guy now.*



"Look, Hawkshaw, if you've got any information I ought to have, information that'll help me crack this case and put you in the clear—"

"Oho. Beginning to doubt the wisdom of pinching me, are you?" I said. "Now you're getting sensible. When you're sensible I don't mind playing ball with you."

"Play it, then."

I said: "Okay; let's inspect the setup. First we have a chick caught in the storm with a flat tire and a useless spare. She signals me as I roll by and I give her a lift. While I'm carting her home she passes out. She's still out when I get here. I leave her in my jalopy while I ring the front doorbell and roust her husband. She's alone maybe three minutes; four or five at the outside. The next time I see her she's defunct by the shotgun route."

"Yeah."

"Now then, there was no noise of a

shotgun being fired during those three to five minutes I was away from her. And although the blast tore through her chest and came out her back, I didn't pipe any pellets in the upholstery of my heap—as there should've been if she was plugged while sitting there. Moreover, it develops that her flesh is already cooling off; much too soon. Add these discrepancies together and what answer do you get?"

Dave rubbed his chin bristles. "The answer is, she was probably dead before you brought her here. Which absolves everybody who was here in the house; nobody sneaked out and pulled the bump-off while you were at the front door."

"So it would seem on the surface," I agreed. "But it was a living dame who flagged me down; and she was still alive when I berthed my bucket beneath the porte-cochere. Unconscious, mind you, but alive. Does that suggest anything?"

Tim Macklin's shapely daughter said: "It suggests you're a liar, Mr. Turner. The chances are you'd had a fight with Connie and killed her over there near Pasadena."

"That's how it looks to me, too," Donaldson said. "I guess we better take you downtown, Sherlock."

"Ix-nay!" I growled. "Why should I fight with Mrs. Macklin? I didn't even know her."

The brunette Cynthia lifted a lip. "Didn't know her! I'll bet you were one of her sweet-stuffs."

"Evidently you didn't think much of your stepmother, eh, hon?" I remarked casually.

She said frankly: "I hated her from the day dad married her. I knew she was nothing but a . . . a tramp. The fact that you killed her in a tryst-quarrel proves it. If it hadn't been you, some other of her boy-friends would have sooner or later—"

"Cynthia, stop that!" Tim Macklin rasped. Unexpectedly he popped her across the chops with the flat of his hand. "Connie's dead. I won't stand for you talking about her that way." He whanged her again with a sharp splatting noise,

and red marks bloomed brightly on her complexion.

Maybe he could have got away with this if she'd been younger and unmarried; but she was of age and she had a husband. The tall and wispy Britisher, Cedric Blessmere, yodeled: "You can't slap my wife like that, by gad. Even if you are her father!" Whereupon he sailed at the cowboy star, commenced biffing him.

CEDRIC chose the wrong rooster. Macklin packed a punch despite his years; I'd found that out a while ago when I tangled with him outdoors. He swung from his insteps, connected with Cedric's jaw and knocked him stiffer than a load of lumber. Chaos then descended on the scene. The Britisher fell against Dave Donaldson and they both went down in a scrambled tangle to the accompaniment of Dave's infuriated scream that he would be eternally damned if he ever came across such a mess.

Meanwhile Cynthia flurried toward her father, nails outstretched and clawing. "How dare you hit Cedric!" she raged. "I'll scratch your eyes out!"

The rest of the cops in the room leaped to interfere in this display of filial undevotion; and for a moment nobody was looking my way. I sauntered unobtrusively toward the door as if merely trying to keep out of the fracas; paused and torched a coffin nail while making sure I was unobserved. Satisfied I was safe, I whirled and ran like hell.

Miscalculated slightly, though. Tim Macklin lamped me as I made my scam, and he moved like lubricated lightning. First he heaved his brunette daughter off his neck, slapped her bowlegged. Then he dived for a desk in one corner of the room, yanked open a drawer, hauled out a Colt .44 hogleg. I saw the cannon and added a burst of speed, gained the doorway, catapulted myself past it just as the .44 sneezed: *Ka-Cheeyow!* in bellowing accents. A slug nipped splinters from the lintel and spat them at me, but I was a good five yards away by that time and gaining velocity with every stride. I





reached the entrance hall, bashed the portal open, leaped out onto the front portico and took temporary refuge behind one of the Georgian Colonial columns while deciding what the hell to do next. I knew I had to powder in a hurry; the Macklin hambo was altogether too swift with his Colt.

I wondered if he could be as expert with a shotgun. . . .

I didn't dare to try to get to my coupe around at the side of the joint. That was too obvious; pursuit would converge there. What I needed was a stratagem—and the Georgian pillar was it. I embraced its sturdy thickness, wrapped my arms and legs around it; shinnied upward as fast as I could climb. Luck was with me. I came to the tapered top and hauled myself bodily over the projecting edge of the narrow porch roof just as a cluster of characters belched out of the front door directly below. Everybody started plunging through the rain, fanning out across the garden and lawn in

a misguided effort to track me down.

Thumbing my nose in their general direction, I wormed my way along the roof of the portico; presently came to a window leading into an upstairs bedroom. It was closed but I tested it, found it was unlocked. I raised the sash, straddled the sill, dropped down inside and hunkered there in solid darkness; it was as good a hiding place as any, and maybe I could stay until the heat died. At least I was indoors and out of the storm, which was more than you could say for the dizzy slobs who were hunting me.

THE very fact that they *were* hunting me made me as sore as an ulcerated tooth. I'd been accused of a bump I hadn't pulled, I'd been knocked groggy by the Macklin ham's brawny knuckles and rendered senseless by Cedric Blessmere's roscoe. I had also been placed in custody by Dave Donaldson and shot at by a .44 cannon which wasn't loaded with sofa pillows. And it had all started because I was chivalrous enough to give a corpse a ride in my wagon—a dead muffin who'd moved and talked as if she'd been alive. And now, to make the situation nastier, I was a fugitive from what is laughingly called justice.

Justice, hell! I'd stepped into a frame and there was a fifty-fifty chance I would be railroaded to the San Quentin smokehouse and sprayed with cyanide perfume. You can't go around croaking movie stars' wives without being penalized—only in this case the penalty was being rigged for the wrong gee. I was innocent and I had to prove it. But quick.

I whisked out my pencil flashlight, risked a brief beam from its miniature bulb. The twinkle of light revealed my surroundings: a feminine boudoir. I couldn't be sure whether it belonged to the late lamented Connie Macklin or to her brunette step-daughter Cynthia who admittedly had despised Connie's tripe. Nor did I care. I'd already caught a gander at an object on the bed table—a telephone. That gave me a sudden idea, meshed the gears in my think-tank. Keeping my mental fingers crossed, I scuttled to the phone; dialed police headquarters.

When they came on the line I asked for Homicide, got connected and lowered my voice to a disguised growl. "This is Lieutenant Donaldson," I lied like a gas meter.

"Yes, lieutenant."

"I'm out here on that Mrs. Tim Macklin kill."

"Yes, lieutenant."

"Now listen," I said. "When her body arrives I want a post-mortem on it and a full report of the stomach contents—"

"Stomach contents, lieutenant?" the guy sounded startled. "In a case of death by gunshot wound?"

I rasped: "You heard me," in Donaldson's best truculent style. "I want a post mortem, an autopsy, an analysis of alcohol in the stomach—if any. Now tell the medical examiner to get busy." I rang off before there could be any more questions slammed at me; I wasn't in the mood to furnish the answers. Not just then, anyhow, because abruptly I'd heard footfalls approaching the bedroom where I was holed up.

The steps came closer. Somebody turned the doorknob.

I doubled over in the darkness, waited for the portal to push inward. When it

did, light trickled from the hall and silhouetted a delishful figure whose outlines I tabbed. Macklin's daughter, Cynthia Blessmere, was ankling in.

Her advent wasn't strictly included on my schedule but I took immediate advantage of it. Not even breathing, I let her come all the way over the threshold. She closed the door after her, fumbled at a wall switch, clicked it and made light. Then I rose behind her, pinioned her with one arm, put my other duke over her splendid yapper. I whispered grimly: "Sister, if you struggle or let out a beef I'll brain you."

## CHAPTER IV

### *Double Burn*

THE BRUNETTE muffin was a good soldier, I'll say that for her. She had courage. When she squirmed around and recognized me there was no panic in her peepers; just cold steadiness. "What now, murderer? Do you plan to kill me the way you did Connie?"

"No, because I didn't kill her."

"Your running away was as good as a confession." Then she added: "You didn't run far, did you?"

I said: "Just straight up. And now we're going to talk."

"Really? What about?"

"Your step-mother."

"I don't care to discuss her. Besides, what is there to talk about? There's nothing I might say that you don't already know—since you were one of her sweethearts."

"Not her sweetheart," I said. "Her fall guy."

"How do you mean that?"

"I mean I've been leveling when I said I never met her before. The first time I ever laid eyes on her was tonight when I gave her a ride through the rain. As a result of which I'm now hotter than a two-dollar waffle iron. I need help."

"You've come to the wrong shop for that." Her voice held ice cubes. "The only thing I'll help you to is a ticket to the lethal chamber. I hated Connie but I en-



dured her because my father loved her. Now his heart's broken because she's dead. Maybe it'll mend a little when



*I volplaned down the stairs and impacted against the cowboy hambo's chest hard, feet first.*

you've been executed."

"Bloodthirsty people, you Macklins," I commented. "Always going around trying to install me in a mahogany kimono. How would you like it if I turned the tables?"

"In what way?"

I said: "Suppose I beat this croakery rap and hang it on your old gent instead?"

"My . . . my dad? You're crazy!"

"Am I?" I leered at her.

"You must be if you think . . . if you hint that he shot her! He was in love with her. He—"

"Love leads to jealousy sometimes," I said. "And you've spoken of the fact that she had a lot of boy-friends on the side. If that's true, then your father's motive is obvious. He killed her because she was three-timing him."

"That's insane! And besides, he didn't have any opportunity—I mean he answered the doorbell when you rang, and then went with you to her car and she was dead, so how could he have killed

her and been with you at the same time?"

"He was quite a while answering the bell," I needled her.

"Even so, there was no report—"

I said: "Yeah, yeah, I know. The way it looks now, she was already deceased when I ferried her home. Okay, maybe your dad shot her there by the Annandale golf course, then drove back home; got here ahead of me."

"That's a lie. He wasn't out of the house all evening. I know. I was here myself. He went to bed early. Connie left right after supper and was gone until . . . until you brought her body home. You can't wiggle out of it that way, Mister Killer. You can't put the blame on my father for something you did yourself."

I grinned thinly. "I could try hard."

"You wouldn't dare! Dad's innocent."

"So am I," I said. "That's why I'm asking you for help. Maybe you can see, now, how an innocent party can have suspicion tossed at him. Look, toots, let's discard your old man for a moment. Also let's

include me out. Assume I've been telling the truth."

"So wh-what?"

I said: "In that case we've got to try to explain some things which aren't even reasonable, such as a defunct dame walking around thumbing rides."

"You're still sticking to the impossible story, are you?" She glowered at me.

"Yeah, because it isn't as impossible as it sounds. Suppose we try this on for size: Somebody shoots Connie near Annandale. After riddling her with buckshot the murderer scrams, leaving her ostensibly dead. But there have been instances where persons shot and dying have lived a while, moved around. You can find such cases on record in any police file. Somebody gets plugged fatally but doesn't kick off for several minutes, perhaps longer."

"You . . . mean—?"

I nodded. "Sure. Maybe your stepmother was on her last legs when she thumbed me. Maybe she was harboring a chest full of lead at the time but didn't mention it for reasons of her own. Suppose she was scared to speak of it for fear I would dump her out of my bucket? She might have figured I'd be afraid of getting involved in a mess, so she kept quiet about her condition. It's a plausible presumption. All right; then I bring her home. En route she passes out. I think she's merely unconscious, but actually she's gone to her ancestors. How does that sound?"

"You . . . you m-make it sound possible, at least. Not probable—but perhaps it could have happened that way."

**A**FTER a pause I said: "Thanks for that much. Which brings us to the following step. I know I didn't cool her. You feel sure your father didn't. And yet you've got the notion that she was knocked off during some kind of tryst; that one of her sweeties did it."

"Yes."

"Well, then, that's where you can help me."

"How? I don't quite understand."

"Sure you do," I said. "Just give me

a list of the guys she'd been playing around with. I'll take it from there."

"But . . . but I don't know them. I don't know their names. I . . . I can't tell you because I'm not sure—" She hesitated. "I could mention the ones I suspect, but would that be honest? I mean after all, I never had any actual proof. Just hearsay, and my own intuitions. Some observation too, of course. But Connie was clever. She kept her . . . her romances well covered. I don't think dad ever even guessed what was going on. I *know* he didn't, the way he slapped my face to-night for what I said." She rubbed her cheek reminiscently; made a rueful mouth.

"Now hold on," I rumbled. "You talk about your intuitions. Is that all you've got to go on? That, plus the fact that you disliked Connie personally?"

"My dislike had nothing to do with it. It's true I didn't want my father to remarry; it seemed like a . . . a profanation of my mother's memory. Naturally I resented a stepmother. But I resented Connie more than I'd have resented anyone else—because I knew what kind of person she was. I mean she was no good. She was a bit player at dad's studio; she supported him in a couple of minor roles and made up to him shamelessly. Set her cap for him. Vamped him, I suppose you'd call it."

I said: "The hell with all that. What I want is the names of the guys in her life." A hunch began to gnaw on me. "Listen, baby, are you dragging out this dialogue hoping to hold me here until somebody barges in and puts the arm on me? Are you running a shenanigan, by any chance?"

"Certainly not!" She bridled, and seemed on the brink of adding something more emphatic to her denial. The words died in her throat, though, because just then somebody opened the door; blipped blithely into the boudoir.

The newcomer was her British hubby. "I say, Cynthia," he called out before he noticed me. "They haven't yet found that Turner fellow, and I burned—"

"He's behind you! Take him!" she



shrilled shrewishly. "I kept him busy talking—Cedric, look out!"

UNFORTUNATELY for Cedric he was a trifle slow on the uptake; the brunette tomato's warning didn't help him a bit. With one spring I landed on him, wrestled him around, measured him for what he needed. There was already a bruise on his wattles where Tim Macklin had walloped him with a right uppercut downstairs a while ago; the purplish swelling made his map lopsided, gave his straw-colored mustache a drunken slant. To balance this I dealt him a dynamite left hook that landed with a jolting thud and nearly dislocated my arm. It also dislocated Cedric's grey matter. He dropped like a chopped tree.

Cynthia informed me that my parents had lived in kennels and came tearing into me under forced draft. I made a loose fist, clipped her on the dimple and deposited her on her cornerstone. The path to the doorway was now clear and I loped for it with my hip pockets dipping sand; raced out into the second-floor hall and pelted down the stairs hellity-blip.

Then, when I got halfway down, trouble loomed.

The trouble took shape in the person of Tim Macklin himself; he'd just entered the stash from the front portico and now he pipped me as I descended toward him. He raised his right mitt, brandished the same Colt .44 hogleg he had tried to use on me earlier in the clam-bake. In another instant his trigger finger would pull.

I jumped. I made like Superman. I hurled my tonnage into the atmosphere, volplaned down the rest of the stairs and impacted against the cowboy hambo's chest, feet first. Our collision was an even exchange; he broke my fall and I broke four of his ribs. The cannon sailed out of his clutch and he dropped flat on his back, gasping, his lungs paralyzed. It wasn't a nice way to treat a guy of his vintage, but what the hell; this was no time to be polite to your elders.

I scooped up his dropped roscow, rammed it into my pocket. And with the

same motion I whipped out my handcuffs, nipped one of Macklin's wrists and clicked the other cuff around a newel post of the stairway banister. Having accomplished this, I turned in my tracks and streaked toward the wigwam's rear.

There were two possibilities confronting me; I was like a harried traveler beset by redskins and wondering which fork of the road led to safety. If I'd been twins I'd have separated, gone in both directions at once. Not being twins, I chose the basement; maybe it would prove to be a blind alley but that was the chance I had to take.

A HASTY search through the butler's pantry and the oversized kitchen finally paid off; I located a door that gave access to the cellar stairway. Down the steep steps I plunged, lighting my way with the dim yellow glow of my pencil torch. At the bottom I broomed away the blackness with my flash ray; copped a slant at a huge automatic oil-burner furnace which proved not to be functioning at the moment, except for a pilot flame no bigger than a blue spark. I snarled: "Aw, nuts!" and went chasing back upstairs in temporary frustration.

Back of the kitchen was a service porch, and behind that was the rear yard of the estate—a tiled-patio effect the dimensions of Rhode Island. Off beyond it lay the combined garage and servants' quarters styled like a plantation coach house, while in the immediate distance there was a swimming pool which wasn't as large as Lake Michigan. You could have kept whales in it, however.

I skirted this inland ocean, went ramming through the rain toward the garage with the scent of smoke in my smeller. Now I was a bloodhound, sniffing at a trail. The odor got heavier. I slogged around back of the carriage house, and there was what I was looking for—a big concrete incinerator for the disposal of garbage and trash.

Thin grey clouds came up from its funnel-shaped chimney and were instantly diluted by the attack of fat warm rain-

*(Continued on page 116)*

**DAN TURNER - NO. 36**  
**HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE**

Story by  
**ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM**

"ALIBI  
POLICY"

Pictures by  
**ADOLPHE BARREAUX**

LATE AT NIGHT, DAN TURNER  
KNOCKS ON THE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT  
DOOR OF SID BROWN, SHOESTRING-  
PRODUCER OF INDEPENDENT QUICKIES...

WHAT DO  
YOU WANT?

I'D LIKE  
TO SEE  
SID BROWN.

MR. BROWN  
AIN'T RECEIVING  
NO VISITORS.

BUT I'M DAN  
TURNER, PRIVATE  
SHAMUS. SID  
PHONED ME A  
FEW MINUTES AGO  
AND ASKED ME  
TO COME HERE.

OH YEAH? WELL  
I GUESS I BETTER  
LET YOU IN.

THAT'S MORE  
LIKE IT,

UG-G-GH!

YOU MEAN  
THIS IS MORE  
LIKE IT,  
SUCKER!



WHEN TURNER COMES TO, HE HAS BEEN DRAGGED INTO SID BROWN'S LIVING ROOM, WHICH IS NOW LIGHTED.

YIPE, MY POOR NOGGIN!

IT'S A WONDER YOU WEREN'T KILLED.

WHO SAID THAT?

I SAID IT.

JEEPERS! IT'S SID BROWN IN PERSON - AND HANDCUFFED!

WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED, PAL?

GET ME OUT OF THESE CUFFS AND I'LL TELL YOU.

START SPILLING WHILE I TRY SOME OF MY MASTER KEYS.

THERE'VE BEEN SOME ROBBERIES IN THIS BUILDING LATELY AND IT WORRIED ME.

I WAS SCARED MY PENTHOUSE MIGHT BE NEXT. THAT'S WHY I PHONED YOU.

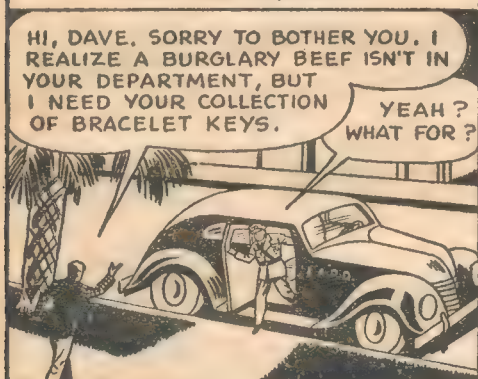
BUT THE BURGLAR GOT HERE AHEAD OF ME, EH?

YES. HE HANDCUFFED ME HELPLESS AND STOLE SOME VALUABLE JEWELS FROM MY WALL SAFE.

AND WHEN I ARRIVED HE CONKED ME AND TOOK A POWDER. I GET IT.



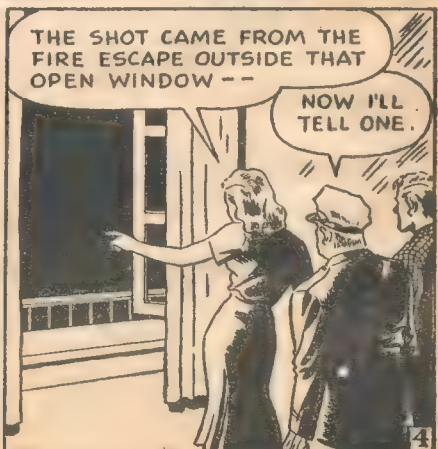
PRESENTLY, TURNER'S SUMMONS BRINGS HIS FRIEND DAVE DONALDSON OF THE HOMICIDE SQUAD --

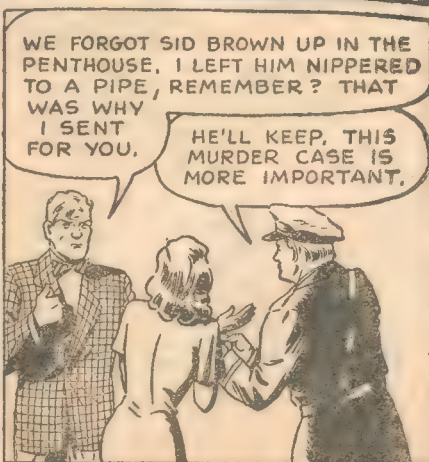
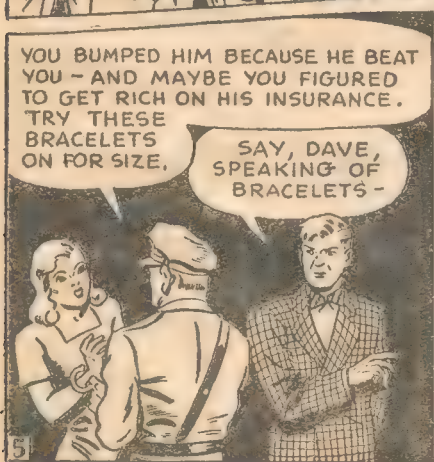
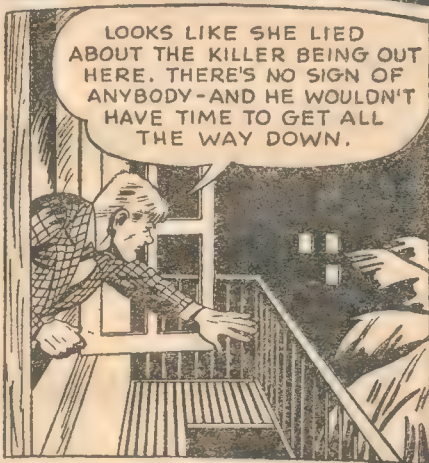
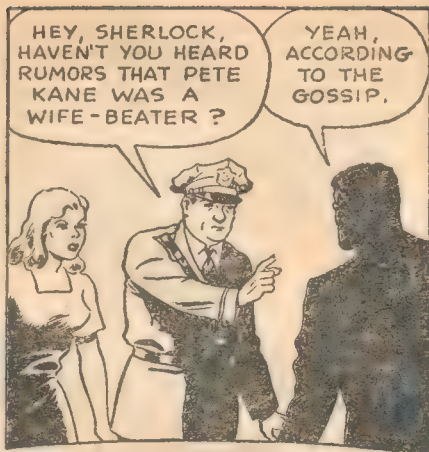


GOING UP IN THE AUTOMATIC ELEVATOR, TURNER EXPLAINS --

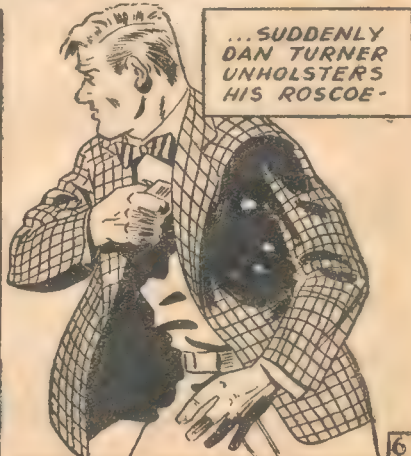
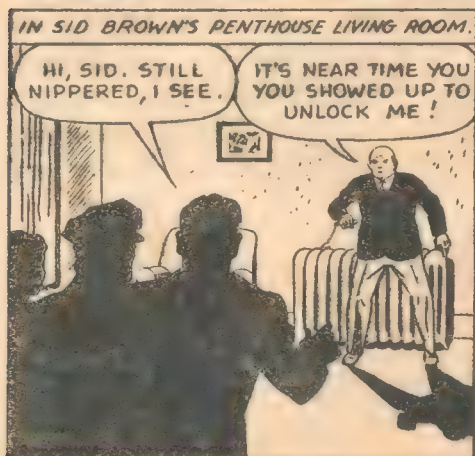


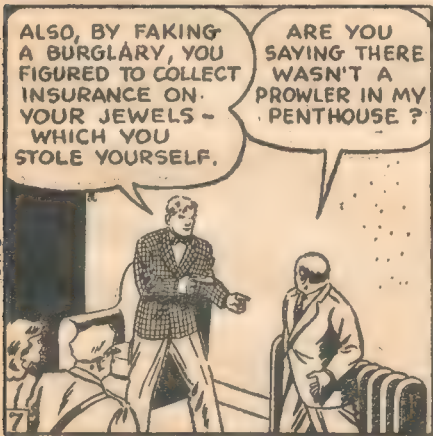
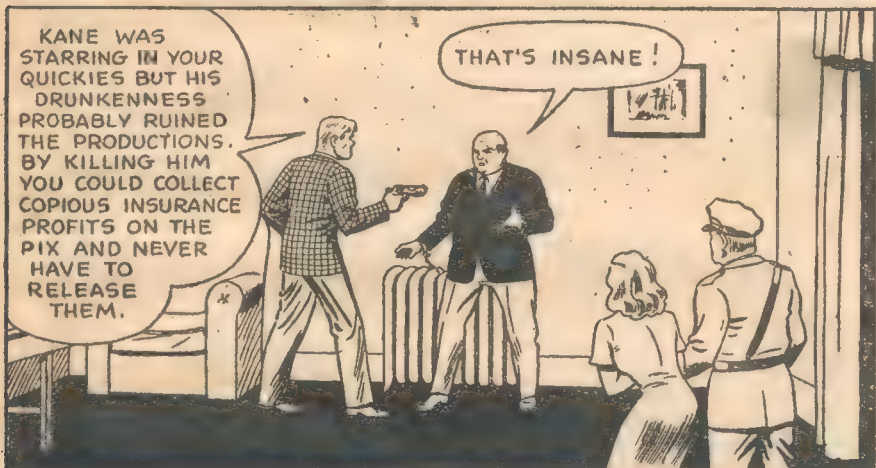














YOU DRAGGED ME IN, TURNED ON THE LIGHTS AND HANDCUFFED YOURSELF BEFORE I WOKE UP. THEN YOU SENT ME OUT TO GET KEYS TO UNFASTEN YOU.

NOW LISTEN -



ACTUALLY YOU ALREADY HAD A KEY. AS SOON AS I LEFT, YOU UNLOCKED THE HANDCUFF AND CLIMBED DOWN THE FIRE ESCAPE.

IT'S A LIE!



YOU SHOT KANE THROUGH HIS WINDOW AND GOT BACK UP HERE IN TIME TO NIPPER YOURSELF TO THAT PIPE -

I HAVEN'T BEEN AWAY! I'VE BEEN LOCKED HERE! IT'S A PERFECT ALIBI!

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A PERFECT ALIBI --BUT YOU MADE ONE MISTAKE THAT PUT YOU IN THE GREASE.

WHAT MISTAKE?

WHEN I LEFT YOU, IT WAS YOUR LEFT HAND NIPPED TO THE PIPE. NOW IT'S YOUR RIGHT! WHICH PROVES YOU'VE BEEN AWAY.

OH, GOOD GOSH!!



AFTER THE KILL YOU GOT SO EXCITED YOU PUT THE WRONG WRIST BACK IN THE CUFF. I BET A PARAFFIN TEST WILL SHOW YOU FIRED A GUN, TOO.

YOU - YOU'VE GOT ME... I CONFESS!



LET THE DOLL GO, DAVE, AND RUN THIS RAT, BROWN, DOWN TO THE BASTILLE.

OKAY, GENIUS. REMIND ME TO BUY YOU A DRINK LATER.



8

DAN TURNER'S NEW CASE IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

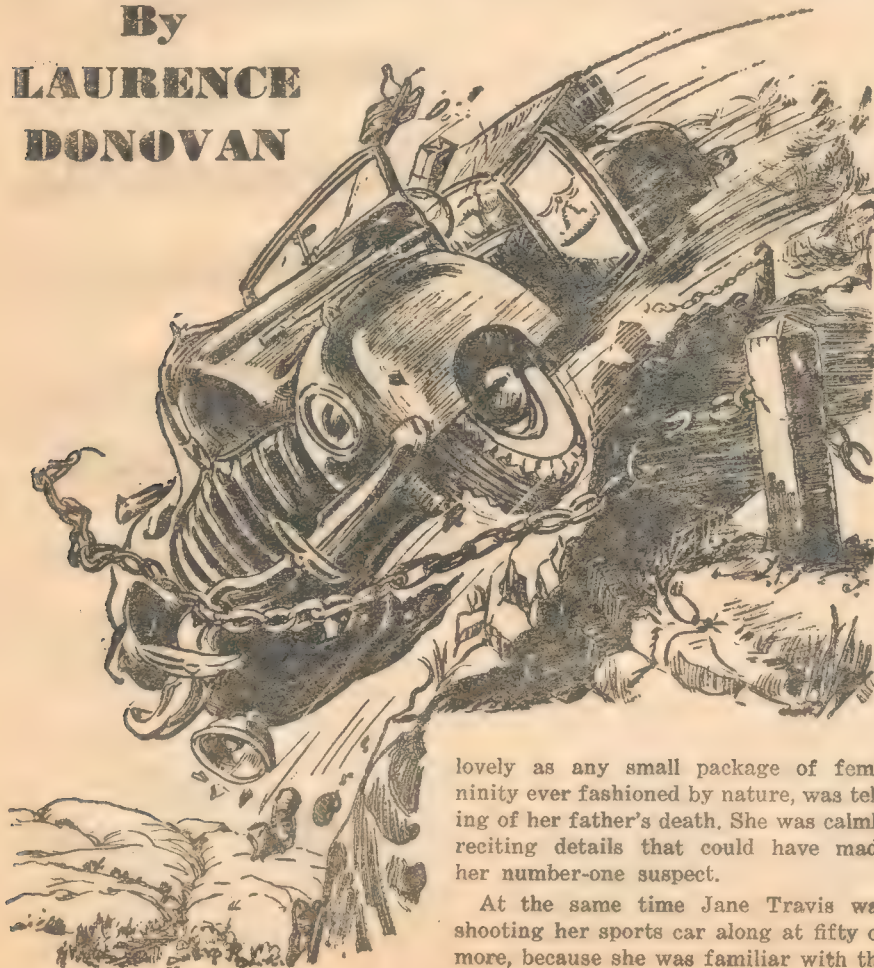
# HOMICIDAL HOLIDAY

**I**F Tom Kent had been less bemused and puzzled by the girl driver's story of murder he had been listening to, he might have prevented the topless sport convertible from skidding and diving over the 500-foot grade toward Porcupine Creek. As it was, Kent's mind

was both intent and bewildered by the story of the strange killing of Howard Travis, multi-millionaire mine owner and rancher.

Kent's reaction was too slow when the explosion of the blown-out tire slapped his big ears. Jane Travis, as neat and

By  
**LAURENCE  
DONOVAN**



lovely as any small package of femininity ever fashioned by nature, was telling of her father's death. She was calmly reciting details that could have made her number-one suspect.

At the same time Jane Travis was shooting her sports car along at fifty or more, because she was familiar with the



*Shamus Kent had intended merely to go fishing, and he did indeed—fishing for a ruthless killer who had struck twice and was fully as eager to knock off Kent and a beautiful girl, along with a well-known movie actress and her director, here in the big wilderness!*

Illustrated by H. L. V. Parkhurst

*Kent exerted his full strength, threw himself sidewise, and carried Jane with him in a smashing fall to the flat concrete at the canyon edge. It was near death.*



twisting S curves of the hard, two-car road that literally overhung the drop to the rocks of Porcupine canyon. The daughter of the late Howard Travis had, by impulsive action, reached Kent, private dick and all-around sportsman, with a phone call a few minutes before he would have left his San Francisco office

for the day. It had made Kent curious.

Jane Travis had been calm, perhaps too cool, for a girl whose father had been discovered murdered within the hour before. Moreover, her keenness had been expressed in her startling message.

"You would be coming up to the Klamath for the steelhead fishing in a week

or two, Tom," she had said. "I need you at once. On the next plane leaving S. F. for our only airport. I'll meet you just before dark. I can't tell you much, Tom, but my dad has been killed. It seems a woman did it, and it can be made to appear as if I were that woman."

Thus it was that within two hours after that phone call, Tom Kent was looking with reflective gray eyes at the sunset glitter of the Mount Shasta snowcaps, and putting his mind almost fully upon Jane's story of the murder. The exploding front tire was on the side above the creek canyon.

KENT'S instinctive grab for the wheel to help the girl hold the open car on the road between the precipitous wall above and the dangerous space below was slowed for two or three seconds by his own thinking. Jane didn't cry out, and, knowing her for two previous years, Kent could understand her cold nerve.

Jane's calm effort to control the slithering car was not enough. Kent's big, capable hands went to the wheel, but he snapped himself erect and his hands traveled on to encircle the girl's slim body. The hood of the open car was already dipping over the shoulder of the road when Kent exerted his full strength, threw himself sidewise, and carried Jane Travis with him in a smashing fall to the flat concrete at the canyon's edge.

Kent wasn't sure that his shoulders and spine hadn't been crushed when he landed. Jane Travis was small but as compact a bundle of sweetly-curved body as could be put into the female form. Kent had a dizzying, nauseous sensation that would have meant a complete fade-out if he hadn't put all of his will toward averting a further roll over the edge of the shoulder.

Jane's fall had been broken by Kent's heavily-muscled body. The shamus must have closed his eyes to help collect his senses, for he opened them to the touch of the girl's small hands rubbing at his temples.

"I would drive crazy and not have my mind on it!" the girl exclaimed miser-

ably. "Tom? Can you hear me? What'll I do now?"

Perhaps it was the swift brushing of her warm lips over his cheek that made Kent fully aware of what had happened. Jane was making her speech loud so she could be heard above the metallic crashing and splintering of the convertible down upon the first outcropping of rocks.

"I'm—I guess I haven't busted anything important," said Kent, exploring his shoulders and the back of his head with a cautious hand. "Break o' luck, Jane, we're not down there in that heap."

Kent sat up, climbed to his feet slowly. The girl broke for the first time with half a sob and half a relieved laugh. Kent stood there looking down where the shattered chassis of the car had piled up on the first rocks, but a hundred feet or so down.

Jane's curved mouth was like a white line in her nut-brown face.

"If it hadn't been—well, in two ticks of a watch it wouldn't have mattered if I was suspected in my father's death, or that I'd called you in over the head of the county law to get at the real truth—"

Jane broke off what she was saying, and she was staring down at what had been a sports convertible. The mountain highway was already darkened, although the sun in the west was still gleaming upon the Shasta snowcaps.

Kent made sure his .38 was still under his armpit and that his clothes were not too badly torn. Jane hadn't mentioned why she might not have trusted the law as administered in the rich mining and dude ranch county up here near the Oregon line. Kent waited.

Jane's piquant face drew into a frown of concentration.

"Tom, that's funny, and maybe I'm only upset by dad's death and everything!" she exclaimed. "But both front tires were brand new and they weren't synthetic either. I wouldn't have been driving like a fool if I hadn't known that."

Without replying, Kent walked up the road a few yards, taking in the canyon side of the curve. He could see about one



hundred yards back where a clump of laurel bushes grew on a narrow shelf just below the level of the highway.

For the moment, in the mountain empire of the Siskiyou, where the high Shasta dam had created a blue lake, and wealth had made the county one of the richest in the state, Kent felt as if Jane Travis and he were alone in another world. There was no sound of any other car on the road either way.

"Stay here, Jane," directed Kent quickly. "There are bushes and cracks in the rock. I'm having a look at that car."

"No, please, Tom—" But the girl's protest was lost.

KENT was already letting himself down the precarious natural ladder. Then he was beside the wreckage. All of the tires had been torn and blown out by the car's plunge. Kent crawled up beside the front wheels. It was so dark that he was forced to depend upon his sensitive fingers, but he found what he had been looking for.

Kent used his pocketknife to dig into a piece of the rubber and fabric of the front tire. He was able to mark where the tire had been blown out and he found the bullet of a small caliber gun that had lacked sufficient force to pierce both sides of the new and resistant tire. He placed the small bit of lead in his pocket, swearing to himself.

Tom Kent was thinking of Jane's story of the death of Howard Travis as he climbed slowly back to the highway.

Howard Travis had become wealthy through a mine in the Mule Tail mountains near Gold Beach, and the conversion of his big mountain property into a popular dude ranch. In this case, wealthy sportsmen, fishermen from Southern California and outside, flocked to the Klamath River country during late summer and early fall.

Steelhead trout ran the Klamath and tributary creeks. Of all the gamy fish, the big sea-run steelheads were the gamiest. It had been this attraction that had brought Tom Kent, private investigator,

to the Travis ranch for two past seasons.

Only the year before, more of the Hollywood movie colony with "income tax" time on their hands, had been drawn to the Klamath. It had almost influenced Tom Kent to pass up the steelhead season this year.

Kent was thinking this out before he again reached Jane on the highway. The girl had asserted that her father had been killed by a small caliber gun, such as a woman might use. Jane had said that Sheriff George Walling, who was also a rich ranch owner, had hinted at finding evidence, other than the death slug's caliber, that a woman had committed the crime.

GETTING back to the road, Kent said nothing of the bit of lead that he was convinced had been meant to end the life of Jane Travis or himself, probably of both. The highway was still deserted and Kent realized a hidden ambusher would have had time to make a getaway when the car plunged.

Kent made a wry grimace and said: "Looks like we're in for a long hike to your ranch, Jane. You haven't indicated that some other woman than yourself might be under suspicion."

"I haven't," stated Jane. "It would look like being catty to mention this, but you'll have to know, Tom. Before I mention the name, one of the best known in Hollywood, I want you to know it is fantastic to suspect her, and that Sheriff Walling hasn't mentioned the name."

Kent rubbed his hard chin reflectively.

"It has been in the newspapers that Marva Durant, star of Superba pictures, had been about to give up her career to marry your father, Jane," said Kent gravely. "She's been up here for the fishing, with Rod Chalmers, her director. That also has been news."

Jane nodded, but she said quickly: "I didn't like the idea of dad marrying Marva Durant, who is about my own age or younger. But in spite of it probably cutting off most of what I might inherit, I don't believe Marva had either

the meanness or the opportunity to kill my dad, because Marva was fifty miles away at the time at the Rainbow Lake resort. Chalmers, her director, was with her, but he was going on to fish another lake yesterday and early today."

Kent juggled with this idea. His own impression of the recent pictures had been that Marva Durant was about washed up, and would have been out of the movies now if it had not been for good parts and the able direction of Rod Chalmers.

Kent expressed his thought.

"Marrying your father's millions would have been an out for Marva Durant that she must have known she must have in a short time," he said.

Jane nodded to that. Kent was thinking then what would have been the motive for seeking the death of Jane Travis. Once married to Howard Travis, Marva would have legally come in for practically all of his estate. Even if the movie star now knew of Travis' death, the killing of Jane could have gained her nothing.

Kent's line of thought was broken. A car hummed, coming up the highway fast from the direction of Klamath and the Travis ranch. It was a sedan and it carried two men. When it pulled up, the first man out was Sheriff George Walling.

Walling was a stocky man with a blunt chin, and much too well dressed for an average sheriff.

Kent identified the other man as none other than Rod Chalmers, the director who had built Marva Durant into a star. Chalmers wore a fisherman's outdoor attire, but managed to maintain the general air of a master of ceremonies.

"What the thunderation happened, Jane?" demanded the sheriff, but his cold eyes were upon Tom Kent.

"A tire blew out and I lost control," explained Jane. "I had met Mr. Kent at the airport."

Sheriff Walling had thin lips that chewed off his words. His attitude was distinctly hostile.

"Have some special reason for being

up here, Kent?" demanded Sheriff Walling. "Or did you just come fishing?"

"Fishing," bit off Kent, but he didn't specify what kind.

"Better be," declared Sheriff Walling. "We have some trouble on hand, an' I'm reminding you your license doesn't count in my county."

## CHAPTER II

### *Jane Awaits Star*

"I NEVER mix business and fishing, sheriff," said Kent cheerfully. "At the same time I'm not liking your tone, and I don't see any reason for liking you either, Walling."

Rod Chalmers cut in with his smooth voice.

"Let's not make trouble where there isn't any reason," said Chalmers quietly. "The sheriff and I were on the way to the airport. The sheriff is looking for my star, Marva Durant, and he has an idea that she might be taking a night plane south. You folks would have met up with her if she had that plan."

"She wasn't at the airport and we haven't met any car," said Jane Travis. "Don't tell me, Sheriff Walling, you think Marva Durant may know something about the—about my father's death?"

"Huh!" grunted Sheriff Walling. "A woman did it. I'm not yet saying you didn't have the biggest motive, Jane, seeing you might have been losing a fortune. Fortunately for you, I've certain clues that put the finger on Marva Durant."

"Isn't that a little thick, sheriff?" said Jane. "Marva was at Rainbow Lake, four hours' driving over these roads. Also, it isn't likely she'd cut off her own chances at the fortune she might have had by marrying my father."

Kent was amazed at what came next! Rod Chalmers spoke up.

"Marva told me she had a pre-marriage settlement of eighty grand from Travis," he said. "She didn't want to





snapped Sheriff Walling. "However, the slug's been taken out and it is being mailed to Sacramento for a ballistic's check up. You think I ought to explain?"

"No," drawled Kent. "I was just fishing, if it was a target rifle or a lady's gun." He was thinking of the bit of lead that had gone through one part of a tire and lodged in the other part of the rubber.

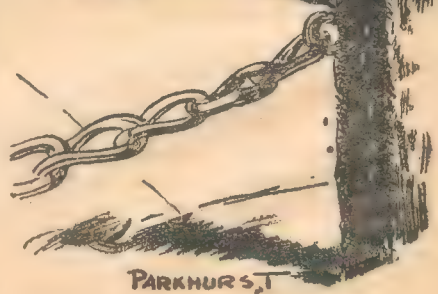
"How would I know?" snapped Sheriff Walling. "Travis was shot in

give up her picture career, and I didn't want her to."

"More than that," interrupted Sheriff Walling. "Marva Durant was away from Rainbow Lake in her car last night, and your father was not found in his library until late this afternoon. The library was locked and the servants thought Travis had gone fishing."

"I suppose you have the bullet that killed Howard Travis?" inquired Tom Kent. "How can you be sure it was from a woman's gun?"

"Which ain't none of your business,"



The film star cracked the sheriff between his eyes with the stock of the rifle, knocking him back.

the throat and so close up that there were powder marks. That means he must have trusted whoever fired that slug. Now it would please me very much, Kent, if you would stay out of our county business and get along with your fishing. I suppose all your fishing junk is smashed up in Jane's car down there?"

"Nope," said Kent good-naturedly. "I didn't want any excess on the plane, and since I was needing some new steelhead things anyway, thought I'd buy some at Klamath."

Jane Travis was watching Kent with a puzzled air. He was deliberately baiting Sheriff Walling, and the girl could not understand why, not knowing of the bit of lead in his pocket that apparently had come from a .22 long.

"Anyway," observed Rod Chalmers, "it doesn't look as if Marva had come this way. She was probably far up the lake, fishing, when your deputies went up the Rainbow."

So Sheriff Walling really had deputies out for Marva Durant, the movie star, thought Kent. Jane Travis broke in.

"I knew my dad had settled eighty thousand on Marva," said Jane coldly. "That still doesn't make me believe she'd sacrifice a chance at the Travis ranch and mine for what wouldn't be more than peanuts."

Again Rod Chalmers, who might have been expected to loyally defend his star, handed out a jolt.

"Marva is pretty big stuff, but still you know she originated over where Hollywood calls 'across the tracks.' Eighty grand might look like one hell of a bite to Marva," said Chalmers.

**K**ENT had never had any reason especially to like or dislike Marva Durant. The past year when he had been fishing, she had been snooty toward the common fishermen at the Travis ranch. But just now his knuckles itched.

"Heel!" he muttered, and he wasn't talking about the back end of a shoe.

The sheriff was looking down at the wrecked convertible.

"Couldn't get down there if we should

want to," he said. "Get in and I'll take you back to Klamath, and I'd advise you, Kent, to stick right to fishing—for steel-head trout."

They got into the car. Sheriff Walling was backing it on the tricky highway to turn around. A coupe came roaring down the road from the direction of the airport. Coming round the curve, it all but piled into the sheriff's car, then crosswise on the road. Brakes screamed as the driver prevented a collision. Sheriff Walling piled out, cursing. Jane gripped Kent's arm.

"It's Marva Durant," she whispered.

Kent saw that it was Marva Durant when Sheriff Walling jerked open the door of the coupe. Kent saw the .22 target rifle on the seat beside Marva.

The sheriff had jammed the rear of his sedan into the highway wall before he had climbed out. That left a narrow space for any other car to pass close to the canyon rim.

Evening had become almost full night. Kent therefore had his glimpse of Marva Durant and the little rifle propped up beside her in a circle cast by Sheriff Walling's suddenly produced flashlight. As he jerked open the coupe's door, the sheriff had bathed the face of the film star fully in the blinding light.

Marva Durant's hair was currently red. Kent recalled that last year it had been black. Marva was beautiful, but the probing flash did something to her, rather than for her. It brought out the hard twist of lips that were a little too heavy. Without makeup and with her hair in disorder, the face of Marva showed strain, perhaps of the moment, but more indelibly as the result of too fast living.

Then, too, Marva's voice was harsh, grating, when she spoke. She beat Sheriff Walling to any verbal punch.

"What the so-and-so's the big idea blockin' the road, you hick copper?" demanded Marva, adding a few words that were far from refined. "Take your hand off my car!"

"Move over, Miss Durant!" barked the sheriff, then called out of the corner of



his mouth, "Pull my car outta the way, Chalmers, and I'll follow you back to Klamath."

Kent thought the film star was moving to obey the sheriff's command. But Marva spat out some real "across the tracks" language and acted with surprising speed.

"If you're thinkin' this rifle belongs to me, you're guessin' wrong!" Marva shrilled out the words. "I saw it in the road an' picked it up, an' you can have it."

The film star picked up the small rifle as if to hand it to Sheriff Walling, and she did. She cracked the gun stock between the sheriff's eyes, knocking him backward into the highway.

Kent pulled in a sharp breath, Rod Chalmers swore shortly, and Jane Travis gasped with momentary fear. Marva Durant shot her little car ahead, driving through that tricky, narrow space between the sedan and the canyon rim. The coupe got by and Kent would have sworn its outside running board was projecting into space.

Possibly Rod Chalmers, the director, was excitable. For he jumped the sheriff's car ahead and Kent was seizing Jane Travis with the hope of again missing a plunge into the canyon in the part of a second that Chalmers twisted the wheel and turned the sedan down the highway.

"You gone nuts, Chalmers?" rasped Kent. "Trying to dump us all down there, or—"

Kent acted then, seeing the immediate danger was past. His big fist caught Chalmers under the ear as he dived over the back of the front seat, seized the rim of the steering wheel, and cut off the ignition.

Chalmers cursed and partly slumped under the impact of the blow. Then the sheriff's car was stopped and the red tail of Marva Durant's coupe winked out of sight around the winding curve.

What Tom Kent had intended to say before he had jolted Chalmers with his fist remained in his mind. For Chalmers had missed the rear of the film star's

coupe by a margin of inches. It struck Kent as incredible that Chalmers had meant to send Marva Durant's car off the shoulder where it would have been certain death.

Then it came to Kent's mind that his idea was not too fantastic. Hadn't Rod Chalmers needlessly mouthed an eighty grand motive that could pin the murder of Howard Travis on his star?

### CHAPTER III

#### *Make It Murder*

"**P**ICK up Marva Durant! Block the Pacific highway! She has to go through the town! And Jenkins! Keep an eye on the two witnesses; They're movie extras, so don't take any chances!"

It was the clipped voice of Sheriff Walling, the words falling as if his thin lips were cutting shears. His forehead showing a blackening bruise, the sheriff was back behind the wheel of his car, having tempered his cursing some because of Jane Travis.

Sheriff Walling sported the latest two-way radio, not often found in a country law officer's car. He had rapped out his order to a deputy named Jenkins at the jail in Klamath.

Kent was back beside Jane and the girl had cold fingers tight upon his wrist. Rod Chalmers was silent now, his good-looking face marred by a swollen jaw where Kent had clouted him.

There was an electrical tension in the sheriff's car. Kent believed the sheriff had intended to order him out, but had decided it would be smarter to keep an eye upon the private dick.

Having given an order to arrest Marva Durant, the sheriff was driving too fast and muttering. Kent spoke up without raising his voice.

"Mind tellin' me the charge against Marva Durant?" drawled Kent.

"None o' your damn'—" Then Sheriff Walling changed his mind. "For the present the charge is felonious attack upon a law officer. I'm not so sure, Kent, but

what I'll lock you up for unprovoked assault and battery."

Kent glanced at Rod Chalmers and heard the director utter a low, husky, "Don't." It was meant for the sheriff only.

Kent laughed with cold mockery. He was wondering about two movie extras who had been named as witnesses by Sheriff Walling.

"Lock me up in your crummy jailhouse, Walling," taunted Kent suddenly. "Seeing he missed killing Marva Durant in Porcupine canyon, I'd like that. Maybe you don't trust Hollywood either, seeing you want a couple of movie extras under the official eye. Hold it, hick copper, as Marva said. See, I'm tossin' away my private badge, Walling. From here out, I'm only a private citizen of the glorious commonwealth of California. Perhaps you don't know enough law to be informed that any private citizen has the same right as a sworn officer to stop a crime or make an arrest if he sees a crime committed."

Sheriff Walling's reply sounded like a bullfrog with its leg in a trap.

THE Pacific highway formed the main street of Klamath. It was lined with knots of citizens in excited discussion. It wasn't every day a famous Hollywood star occupied their dinky jail house.

Sheriff Walling drove straight to the jail. Ruddy-faced Jenkins met him.

"We grabbed her, chief. Holding her without charge until you come in."

"The charge will be murder!" stated Sheriff Walling with cold finality, and with defiant eyes turned toward Kent, as the private dick and Jane Travis climbed out of his car.

Then Sheriff Walling added: "Have you got boys on the two witnesses, Jenkins? We can't trust any of these Hollywood folks too far."

Kent nudged Jane Travis with an elbow and glanced at Rod Chalmers who was trying to make his swollen jaw as inconspicuous as possible. Kent then spoke to Chalmers.

"I suppose, Chalmers, you'll have an

attorney up here from Hollywood?"

Rod Chalmers swung on his heels and there was hate in his eyes as he failed to reply to Kent's question.

"About these movie extras," continued Kent with a cheerful casualness. "Eye witnesses to the murder, sheriff?"

"One block up Shasta Street, on the corner, you'll find a fishing tackle store, Kent," was Sheriff Walling's reply. "There's a good run of steelhead in the Klamath River right now. Some of my boys may be handy to be sure that you don't take more than your daily allowance from the river."

Kent shrugged his big shoulders, grinning at the sheriff and started to turn away. Jane Travis laid a hand on his arm.

"Come on, Tom," she said. "We'll pick up a ride out to the ranch."

Sheriff Walling heard the girl's words and whirled.

"You're staying away from the Travis ranch, Kent!" rasped the sheriff. "You're buying your fishing tackle and you're doing only what the law says while you're in Klamath! Jane had no right to call—"

Kent brought his big knuckles all the way from the level of his knee. It is doubtful if Sheriff Walling had ever been hit so hard on the chin. Then Kent followed up, yanking the sheriff's revolver from its holster. Kent circled facing a score or more of the citizens of Klamath.

"I'd advise you to keep your sheriff in line if you want to retain him as chief law officer of this county," he said.

There was a combined mutter that died. Kent saw the rippling of exposed white teeth throughout the crowd. It convinced him that at least a few Klamath citizens were not pally with their sheriff, who was reported to have made a fortune because of the building of the Shasta dam.

Seeing that no one made a move, not so much as to pick up the recumbent Walling, Kent turned on his hard heels, took Jane's arm and was starting to walk away.

"We'll hire a car, Tom," said Jane. "I take it you're disregarding Sheriff Wall-



Kent brought his knuckles all the way from the level of his knee, hard.



PARKHURST

ing's order to stay away from our ranch."

"Come on, Jane," said Kent. "Let's get the car."

THE Travis ranch lay in a wide bowl of the valley with the snows of Mt. Shasta feeding two crystal creeks that ran through it. The old log ranchhouse was a center for forty or more individual cabins built among the mountain pine and ash trees.

When they left the hired car, Jane fur-  
tively removed a tear from under one

eye. It seemed legitimate enough.

"You'll want to see dad's library, Tom?" she asked. "Sheriff Walling and his deputies and County Attorney Barney Fields haven't left much for anyone to find."

"No, Jane," said Kent. "I take it that Marva Durant had a separate cabin. I suppose that the cabin also has been searched?"

"That seems a little strange, Tom," replied Jane. "But until I left today, neither the sheriff's men nor Attorney

Fields appeared to have any interest in Marva's cabin. I think I saw Rod Chalmers, her director, visit it briefly. That was all."

"We'll have a look," said Kent.

It was well after dark now with a big moon coming up over the range to the eastward. Here and there, fishermen and women in rough clothes, carrying rods and creels that seemed well filled with steelhead, were gathered about some outdoor fires they had built, lying with complete abandon to each other about their day's catch.

Jane had a key and unlocked the film star's cabin. There was a heavy, almost sickening, scent of the kind of perfume that a girl from "across the tracks" might be expected to favor. Jane gripped Kent's arm before he struck a light.

"I'd forgotten to tell you, Tom, that when we broke into dad's library this afternoon, alarmed at his long absence, the air reeked with that same perfume. It attracted a maid on the outside."

Kent rubbed his bluish-black jaw a moment.

"Sounds a bit obvious—too damn' obvious, Jane," he said, "for a girl killer who, by what I gather, was roughly dressed for fishing the landlocked trout at Rainbow Lake or, maybe she used that musky smell to stun the fish."

Jane would have flashed on the electric light switch but Kent stopped her. He produced a brilliant flash. The interior of Marva's cabin was a key to the character of the actress. It would seem that when Marva undressed, she simply stepped out of everything and left both outer and intimate garments in a heap on the floor.

Kent went on a prowl. There was jewelry, much of it cheap, and some worth a lot of dough, left openly on the top of the dressing table.

Kent surveyed the baubles for a moment and then, for no apparent reason, picked up a jewel that was like a shining green eye under his flashlight. If Jane noticed she made no comment. Kent opened drawers and went through the closet.

He found no weapon but he came upon two boxes of .22 longs in a drawer of the dresser. That did not quite match with what Marva had said about finding the small rifle on the highway.

Kent pocketed the green stone but not before he had made a thorough search for what should have been a companion piece of the jewel.

"Would you know, Jane, about the witnesses that Sheriff Walling called movie extras?"

"I wouldn't know about that," stated Jane. "It was the first time I had heard that Sheriff Walling suspected anyone but myself."

Kent flicked out his flashlight. He had not missed the slight scuffling sound outside the door of the cabin.

"Stay back, Jane," he said in a low voice. "I think we may have visitors."

Kent palmed the .38 from his shoulder holster. He held his flashlight ready in his left hand and stepped carefully into the doorway. He was prepared for any surprise that might come from the outside and that was where Kent made his mistake.

He felt as if a split-log wall of the cabin had crashed upon his head. From inside the doorway he stumbled and his nose plowed the dirt outside the door. He did not lift his face because he did not even know that he had all but smashed his nose.

JANE TRAVIS was bathing Kent's forehead with a cold towel. She said, "Please, wake up, darling," or that was the first that the shamus heard. It surprised and pleased him, for their relationship during his fishing vacations had been strictly friendly and no more.

Perhaps it was the note of panic in Jane's voice that really brought Kent around. She had switched on the bright lights of the cottage. As soon as she was sure Kent was able to sit up, Jane's voice lost its almost habitual calmness.

"Tom!" she exclaimed. "There's another killing! It's awful! Dolores, who



was Marva Durant's maid, has been stabbed! Her body is lying behind the couch, and that's why your flash missed it."

#### CHAPTER IV

##### *Strange Figures*

THE nice-looking legs of Dolores, the maid, showed at the end of the cabin couch. The fligreed half of a dagger that Jane said had been Marva Durant's letter-opener was all that showed in the scarlet blossom of life blood on the maid's breast.

Evidently Dolores had put up a brief struggle before the blade had been driven into her heart. She had been wearing a silken blouse and it had been ripped from her white shoulders.

Kent straightened from the body, looking into Jane's troubled eyes and seeing that her tanned face was almost gray. He forgot his own aching head. This was vital.

"You said it was decided that your father was killed during last night and left locked in the library?"

"That was the coroner's decision when he arrived with Sheriff Walling this afternoon," said Jane in a strained voice. "He . . . dad had been shot possibly twelve hours before we became worried that he hadn't returned from early morning fishing and finally opened the library."

Kent was considering a new pattern for the murder. He had been conjecturing that Rod Chalmers was too ready with incriminating words concerning that eighty grand pre-marriage settlement. And he had been convinced that Chalmers had intended to jam his film star's coupe into Porcupine Creek canyon.

"This is a queer complication," said Kent. "Anyone with a skeleton key could have entered this cottage. It hasn't been much more than an hour or so since Marva Durant showed up mysteriously on the road to the airport."

Jane gave him a puzzled frown. She said she didn't understand.



*Kent felt as if a split-log wall of the cabin had fallen on him.*

"The maid's body is still warm," said Kent quietly. "She was killed within the past two hours. From Sheriff Walling's appearance, looking for Marva at the airport, the whereabouts of Marva was not known to the law at that time. That means—"

Jane's lips were compressed as she spoke.

"It might be that a woman's intuition is equal to a detective's cold analysis, Tom. I've every reason to dislike Marva, but I'm convinced she didn't kill either my dad or her maid. There's something out of line, as I see it, in Sheriff Walling's persistence and in Rod Chalmers' backing up the sheriff with a motive for jailing Marva. And I never knew Marva to have a .22 rifle."

Kent had already reached that same theory. Moreover, the killing of the maid could have involved one of two things—

Either the maid had known of Marva Durant returning from Rainbow Lake during the previous night—

Or the maid could have possessed some information that made it important that Marva Durant be removed and that was a threat to some other killer.

In the meantime Kent had been trying to guess at the identity of whoever had knocked him out at the cabin doorway. It could be Sheriff Walling's deputies or others who must be closely associated with the killings.

In either case, Kent knew that the intent had been to block any evidence he might have discovered in the cabin. For Kent's pockets had been explored and but one thing was missing.

This was the gleaming emerald he had taken from Marva Durant's carelessly displayed collection of jewels. The emerald was set in an earring. It gave Kent an idea of the evidence Sheriff Walling must be employing to connect the film star with the Howard Travis murder.

Kent was turning toward the phone in the cabin. He was about to call the sheriff's office, wondering to himself how the roughly handled law officer would like having Kent add another murder to his troubles. Especially since the filigreed dagger handle probably would show no prints, and if it could, the prints of Marva Durant would mean nothing on her own letter opener.

Kent didn't have to use the phone.

"By damn!" rasped the hard voice of Sheriff Walling in the cabin doorway. "Guessed you'd be here when I saw the lights. Didn't I warn you, Kent, to stay away from the Travis ranch?"

"The war's over, sheriff," said Kent. "There's no martial law around Klamath. And I've something that might add to your morbid spirit and possibly your case against Marva Durant."

KENT stepped to one side and gestured to the body of the maid behind the couch. Deputy Jenkins and another man had accompanied the sheriff.

This other man was as close to a fashion plate of what well dressed men should wear as could be found in all of the state. He was a small man, precise in voice and manner and attire.

Barney Fields, the county attorney, was everything he imagined a big time politician should be. And he was the county prosecutor because he was the kind of a boss who had built up a fair personal fortune.

In keeping with his affected manner, Fields wore eyeglasses on a black cord. He never seemed to use the glasses, but a well kept hand constantly fingered the cord.

It was Kent's instant idea that Sheriff Walling had arrived with his deputy and Attorney Fields to arrange for Kent's arrest. You couldn't go around bopping the county law on the chin and making threatening gestures with the law's own revolver.

The discovery of the murdered maid postponed whatever else Sheriff Walling might have had in mind. When he had tentatively examined the body and directed Deputy Jenkins to call Coroner Haskins from Klamath; the sheriff confronted Kent and Jane Travis with his lips so thinned he didn't seem to have a mouth.

"Even a dumb private snoop from the big town can see that I wasn't guessing when I put the finger on Marva Durant," stated Sheriff Walling with a self-satisfied tone. "This adds one more count on which I'm taking you into custody, Kent. In discovering this killing you're a witness I wouldn't trust outside. It has been found out that you're guilty of felonious assault, since you broke Rod Chalmers' jaw with a sneak punch, and there is the further attack upon myself as sheriff."

Sheriff Walling had reached back to his belt and the steel of handcuffs jingled. County Attorney Fields stepped forward quickly and, for once, he put his eyeglasses upon his nose.

"In my opinion, Sheriff Walling, there is nothing to be gained by detaining Mr. Kent," said Fields with his usual concise pursing of his rather small mouth. "Thinking it over, I would have to refuse to issue a warrant for the alleged offenses named. In fact, I would regard it as a favor if Mr. Kent remains with



us and gives us the benefit of his wide experience in cases of homicide."

Kent could have been knocked over with a powder puff before he recovered from the surprising attitude of Attorney Fields.

"Thanks, Fields," he said shortly, watching Sheriff Walling show all the symptoms of a man about to have an epileptic fit. "In that case, may I point out that the unfortunate killing of Marva Durant's maid took place many hours after Howard Travis' death."

Sheriff Walling fought for control and sheared off a few words.

"Yeah, an' Marva Durant was seen around here late in the afternoon when we were looking for her," stated Walling. "She was supposed to be in a cabin at Rainbow Lake last night, too, all night. But I've got two witnesses who saw her driving back to Rainbow Lake shortly before daylight in the morning."

"Sheriff Walling!" ejaculated Attorney Fields with a note of reproof. "As a law officer it isn't wise to be spreading such evidence as you may have in any case. I am the one to investigate the proof you may have come upon."

Kent's broad mouth tightened in a hard grin.

"Would you regard two tough movie extras from Hollywood as unimpeachable witnesses against Marva Durant?" said Kent quietly. "Or are you depending upon the emerald earring which your sheriff probably found near the body of Howard Travis?"

Sheriff Walling swore fluently.

"I haven't mentioned finding an earring!" exploded the sheriff.

"Sorry, Walling," murmured Kent. "Maybe my brain is a bit curdled by having my skull almost bashed in by someone who wanted the mate to such an emerald earring. You wouldn't know about that, of course?"

"Why, you cheap snoop, I'll—"

Sheriff Walling started to swing a fist, but he was blocked by the quick-movement of Attorney Fields.

"I would suggest that we are confronted with two murders and we'll have



*Stepping behind him, Kent pushed his gun into the man's back.*

to work together and solve them if the whole Klamath country isn't to be given a bad reputation," stated Fields. "Mr. Kent, I would suggest that you and Sheriff Walling pursue your investigations without having any further brawling."

"Suits me fine," agreed Kent and left the cabin with Jane Travis clinging to his arm.

As all of the county law was being delayed temporarily waiting for the coroner and further inquiry into the killing of Marva Durant's maid, Jane and Kent were clear of spying eyes in the unusual library of the Travis house. Howard Travis had been a devotee of metallurgy and had possessed hundreds of books on that subject.

Jane made sure the window drapes were closed. She produced a small, black notebook.

"I saw the edge of this sticking from one of Dolores' slippers and I permitted curiosity to overcome the shock of her

death," stated Jane. "It seemed to me that someone had searched the cabin before we were there and the maid had been clever enough to hide this. It probably cost her life."

Kent flipped open the little book. Its strange notations made no sense at first. Then it dawned upon him that here might be the key to the murders and, especially, to Marva Durant being in jail under a charge that would make any story she told sound fantastic.

Kent was looking at initials and figures—

RC—5—3—45—Savoy—LA

RC—10—3—45—Sunset Cabins—Laguna

TY—6—5—45—Savoy—LA

GW—8—11—45—Plant—SF

RC—12—11—45—Weekend—Laguna

JG—7—3—46—Savoy—LA

GW—11—4—46—Plant—SF

BF—6—5—46—Park—Sacram

RC—9—6—46—Savoy—LA

BF—11—7—46—Park—Sacram.

Kent's eyes rambled on and then he snapped the book shut. He glanced at the clear, innocent eyes of Jane Travis. His mouth was lined and he debated what he should say. Jane was a wee bit of precious womanhood in size, but she was grownup enough to surprise Kent. She had been looking over his shoulder.

"Initials, dates, hotels, and cabins?" said Jane musingly. "I wonder if Marva Durant couldn't produce witnesses for each place and date? She was smart enough to hold her starring role, although gossip columnists have been talking about Rod Chalmers wanting to star a youngster named Lora Dean, and have hinted that there is a romance between them."

**K**ENT didn't reply for a moment, reflecting. RC could be for Rod Chalmers. It was ugly, so bad it smelled. Then the other initials could stand for other men, and the kind of smart, wealthy suckers who would know better than to write incriminating letters, no matter what their association with the film star had been.

Kent was thinking of the currently redheaded Marva, with her sultry beauty that was beginning to fade with the strain of living. Unless he was guessing far wrong, the shapely Marva had been making the most of her free and easy morals.

"If this is what it appears to be, I don't want to discuss it, Jane," said Kent slowly. "This evening there was every evidence that Rod Chalmers wouldn't miss his star if she were dead in a canyon, or if she happened to face a murder rap that would disqualify anything she might tell. I want a few minutes to think."

Jane touched Kent's cheek with a caressing hand.

"After all, darling, I'm a big girl now," she said softly. "There are other initials that can be matched, with dates, places and probably witnesses. Initials of a few men who aren't exactly poor."

Kent clicked his teeth and spoke with savage fury.

"GW could be George Walling, wealthy sheriff," he said. "As for the other initials, I don't know—"

"There's BF," suggested Jane quickly.

**K**ENT shook his head. He said: "That seems incredible. There's TY and JG noted down. I must find out the names of the pair of plug-uglies, movie extras, Sheriff Walling counts on to testify that Marva Durant was away from Rainbow Lake for hours during the time your father was killed."

"But the BF, Tom?"

"That remains to be developed," said Kent. "Many men have the same initials. Jane, can you tell me just where your father was found and anything else you remember?"

Jane's eyes were liquid, but they were also bright with growing anger.

"Yes, I can tell you," she said. "I didn't say anything at the time, but Sheriff Walling lied. I kept quiet because I thought he was trying to trap someone, perhaps Rod Chalmers, even me. But Sheriff Walling didn't find any bullet to send out for a test, and there were no



powder marks on my father's throat."

Kent swore under his breath.

"You mean the bullet inflicted a death wound and passed out, and couldn't be found?" demanded Kent.

Jane nodded and tears flooded then.

"Dad's throat was torn by the bullet and it must have lodged somewhere among all those books," she said.

## CHAPTER V

### *Murder Rifle*

TOM KENT slipped a hand to a small pocket under his belt. He had been searched and an emerald earring had been taken. But there was a small, hard lump still in the little pocket.

"Don't be surprised at what I'm about to do, Jane," warned Kent.

"I've never been surprised when you seemed the craziest," replied Jane. "Walling and the others are coming from the cottage."

Possibly anyone but Jane Travis would have doubted Kent's sanity at this moment. In sixty seconds he had pulled down several rows of books, scattering them.

The county lawmen were grinding their boot heels in the gravel walk outside when Kent seized one thick book and opened it. Then he ripped out pages, crumpling and tearing them. He scattered the despoiled book within seconds, then he used the small blade of his pocketknife to jab a hole with uneven edges into the leather back of the volume that had been facing from the shelf.

Kent dropped the book just as Sheriff Walling appeared in the library doorway, flanked by Deputy Jenkins, County Attorney Fields and half a dozen others whom Kent did not recognize.

"Wotinell's the big idea, you crackpot snoop?" slapped out Sheriff Walling. "Jane Travis! You gone plumb crazy, seeing your dead father's books ruined?"

Kent had backed until he was touching the drapes over an open window.

"I've just been proving you're a damn' liar, Walling," stated Kent. "You didn't have any death bullet to send to Sacra-

mento. And finding that out, I don't believe you have two witnesses ready to swear Marva Durant drove down here from Rainbow Lake last night. If so, you don't dare name them."

Sheriff Walling's big hand had his revolver half out of its holster and Kent had one hand in his side coat pocket.

"I admit tryin' to trap a killer by lying about that bullet," rasped the sheriff. "Of course I can name my witnesses. They're being held in custody until we have a hearing. They're Thad Young and John Graves, both from Hollywood, and knowin' Marva Durant long enough not to make any mistake."

Kent added up initials and names in the flash of a second. The TY in Marva's little book of misspent nights and lost weekends could be Thad Young, and the JG could be John Graves. And it came to Kent now that both Young and Graves were script writers for Rod Chalmers.

Tom Kent gave forth a laugh that was wild enough to confirm the sheriff's charge that he was a crackpot.

"That's fine, sheriff!" rapped out Kent and his blue .38 came from his pocket. "So you have the witnesses and I have—the bullet you didn't send to Sacramento. No. Don't move. I've a little errand of my own."

One of Walling's companions jerked off the switch, darkening the library. But Kent was already through the window when Sheriff Walling's revolver exploded and lead whined off the window frame.

Kent had been fast, but not too fast to hear the clipped precise voice of County Attorney Barney Fields.

"Stop it, Walling, you fool! Kent isn't a criminal! Turn on those lights!"

Kent was moving with shadowy quickness when the Travis library again flared with illumination. Kent swore to himself, knowing that Jane Travis probably would be in for a bad few minutes with Walling raging and questioning her.

KENT cut straight for the town of Klamath, a mile away. Only one car passed him, coming at high speed

from behind. It whizzed by and Kent could see it contained only the driver but it was too dark to identify him.

Kent could well imagine the tangle in which he had projected several men. It was highly probable that each of those involved knew little or nothing of the other men's relations with Marva Durant.

He moved swiftly in the darkness until he came to the county jail and sheriff's office. This was in an annex of the county courthouse.

Kent glanced sharply about. He saw no car nor any other visible sign that he had been followed. A middle-aged, bulky man had been left acting as jailer. He was seated behind the desk. Kent opened the sheriff's office door and stepped inside.

"Stay put!" he commanded before the jailer could arise from the chair behind the desk.

Kent's .38 was level. He had not the slightest intention of shooting the man, but the jailer had no means of knowing that, and he lifted his hands.

"I want just one thing from you," said Kent tersely. "Unlock the storage closet over there and bring me any or all target rifles that may be held."

"Yeah, sure," drawled the jailer.

His voice was so easy-like that it rung a little bell of warning in Kent's brain. The jailer moved, fumbling with a bunch of keys. Kent took a few steps nearer to him, his eyes upon the darkness of a corridor that apparently led back to the cells.

The jailer clicked a key into the storage closet's lock. Kent stepped behind him and pushed his gun into the man's back.

"If there's a trick, mister, you'll get it first," he said in a hard voice, wondering what he should do.

The lock of the storage closet opened, banged to the floor and Kent heard the scuffling rush of feet along the corridor. He had just time to crack his automatic across the back of the jailer's head and drop him, hoping that he had not hit too hard.

Kent turned. Two bulky, hard-faced

men with guns in their fists plunged from the corridor into the jail office. When Kent had entered he had marked the location of the light switch.

"Drop your rod, yuh damn' snoop!" ordered one of the oncoming men.

Kent made a movement as if to drop his .38, jumped sideways and snapped the office into darkness. Gunfire blossomed with red viciousness from the guns of both men. Lead whanged and whined from the stone walls of the jail office.

But Kent was flat on his stomach. In the final seconds of light, he had marked his targets. The .38 jolted three times in his hand. One man screamed. Both men thudded to the floor. Kent had marked the position of their legs and cut them down.

He was on them with an animal bound, slashing at their heads in the darkness with the barrel of his automatic. Half a minute later, he was back and had thrown on the lights.

There was but one .22 target rifle in the collection of weapons in the storage closet. Kent grasped it and was coming out. He didn't hear the slithering footsteps but again the lights went out. This time, when a gun cracked, Kent felt the tug of the bullet across his shoulder and his neck was scored by another shot. He dropped and rolled.

The killer was shooting with wild abandon, emptying an automatic. It was Kent's guess that the shooting was panicky and he counted the shots. He came to his feet when he heard the gun click on an empty chamber. Hurtling forward toward where the gun had blazed, his hands grasped the gunman.

Kent was not in the least surprised when his greater strength and weight lifted the other man and hurled him headlong over his shoulders. The other man struck the floor with a deep groan and then was still.

THE lights came on again. A rush of cold air came from the doorway. Sheriff Walling and Deputy Jenkins were standing there with drawn guns.



But Kent now was just inside the door of the storage closet, his own .38 covering the two men.

"I wouldn't, sheriff," drawled Kent easily. "Without going into a lot of details you might not think I know, I'm handing you the murderer of Howard Travis and of Marva Durant's maid."

His gun flicked sideways toward the groaning figure on the floor. Two bulky men with their legs cracked were huddled on the floor of the cell corridor.

For a suspended few seconds, it seemed that Sheriff Walling might lose his head but Kent's gun was unwavering. Underneath all of it, Sheriff Walling was either smart or yellow.

"Lord in Heaven!" he exclaimed. "It couldn't be—Barney Fields?"

"It could be and is!" snapped Kent. "It's your duty to arrest him. I've the bullet that killed Howard Travis; also the target rifle that Barney Fields dropped on the highway hoping Marva Durant would spot it in her headlights and pick it up, which she did. A bullet from that same gun almost dumped Jane Travis and myself into Porcupine Canyon."

The only bullet Kent had was the one he had dug from the tire.

Sheriff Walling's face turned scarlet.

"But I can't hold the county attorney—"

Kent's voice was easy. "Yes Walling, you will hold the county attorney until a prosecutor can be summoned. You boys should get together when you want to play around. You might not remember, Walling, the 8th day of November, last year, at the Plant Hotel in San Francisco or the 11th day of April, this year, at the same hotel? It might be you want to keep on paying—"

"Shut up, Kent!" said Sheriff Walling huskily. "I'll burn you down where you are!"

"And if you do, Walling, you wouldn't want to murder Jane Travis. Jane has a little book filled with initials and dates."

"For heavens's sake, Walling!" came the voice of the crumpled Barney Fields, county attorney, who was still lying on

the floor. "Turn Marva Durant loose. We can fix this up some way."

"By hell!" roared Sheriff Walling. "I'll fix it up!"

His revolver blasted once. Kent's .38 jumped and Walling's shattered wrist was torn loose from his weapon. Deputy Jenkins jumped and ran out the door.

There was a commotion outside the jail. Jane Travis carried a .25-30 rifle in the crook of her arm. Behind her were a dozen of the boys from the Howard Travis ranch.

Kent stepped from the storage closet. He held a target rifle in one hand.

"Hold it, Jane," he said quietly. "Sheriff Walling is about to arrest Barney Fields for the killing of your father and of Marva Durant's maid. Another attorney will have to be brought in to see that justice is meted out. As for these two boys with their busted legs, Rod Chalmers with his broken jaw, and Marva Durant, I think it would be wise if they were permitted to take the morning bus heading for Southern California. We'll have Graves and Young patched up."

"Marva Durant has her punishment for the blackmail she undoubtedly practiced upon all of these men and it would be hard to prove."

"I'm for all of that, Tom," stated Jane Travis. "Being a woman, I know that Marva Durant's punishment—loss of her career, her necessary fading into obscurity—will be worse than any sentence a court could mete out."

Barney Fields was suddenly precise and silent as he walked back into the cell corridor ahead of Sheriff Walling. Walling turned back toward the office and there was hate in his voice.

"Mind telling me what comes next, Tom Kent?" he asked huskily.

Kent was over beside Jane Travis and her hand was on his shoulder.

"You paid out plenty, Walling, for taking your fun where you found it," said Kent. "Barney Fields paid, too, but he saw his political future ruined. As for these others, they were blackmailed into keeping Marva Durant a star. As for me, Walling, I'm just going fishing."

# DEATH ON THE

*Had the louse who married my fiancée actually killed his own father-in-law for a fiddle? It certainly looked that way—and I naturally hoped he was the killer—but as a detective sergeant I had to give him every break, something I hated!*



By  
**FRANK  
ROBERTS**

**F**OOTSTEPS slapped the sidewalk behind me, pounding, running hard. A voice piped shrilly: "Pat—Pat, wait!" There was excitement in the call. A touch of hysteria.

I turned and saw a kid slamming toward me through the dusk, a kid of four-

teen or fifteen. He wore dirty corduroy slacks, a baggy gray sweater and scuffed shoes. His sandy hair needed combing, and when he came closer I noticed streaks on his grimy face. As if he'd been crying.

It wasn't like Lester Harcourt to cry.



# DOWNBEAT.....

Illustrated by Newton H. Alfred



*Ferranti said: "Whitney!" and Barbara said: "Pat!" as I came grimly into her dressing-room.*

At least I had never seen him do it, and I'd known him a long time. His pals didn't call him Lester, they called him Butch or got punched in the jaw. He was that kind. A pretty tough little monkey.

He didn't look tough now, though. He grabbed at my arm, and I thought I saw panic in his eyes. "Pat!" he gulped. "Pat,—" He gulped again.

I wasn't interested in his panic. I

wasn't interested in anybody named Harcourt, period. He should have known that. I'd taken enough pains to make it plain to him, these past couple of years. There are some things you just don't get over, and what his sister had done to me was one of them.

"Scram, punk," I said. I figured there were probably some tough guys after him who were tougher than he was. Okay, let him fight it out and take his beating. It was no skin off me.

He wouldn't let go of my sleeve. "Pat, gee, listen!"

"Scram, I told you." I didn't like to look at his eyes. They were blue, like Barbara's. They reminded me of her. Too much. And I didn't want to be reminded of Barbara. I'd been more than two long years trying to forget her. And failing.

"Pat, you got to listen," he said. That was the trouble with him. Persistent. Maybe because he liked me. Some kids are that way about cops. Hero-worship stuff. He choked: "It's pop."

"What about him?"

"He's d-dead, Pat."

**T**HAT stopped me cold. Somehow you don't like to think of your friends dying. Even when they're friends you've dropped. I'd never had anything against old Aaron Harcourt. He was a nice-enough guy, as music teachers go. A little impractical, maybe. But he'd managed to bring up his two motherless kids on what he earned giving violin lessons. You had to respect him for that.

I looked at Lester. "How'd it happen? Heart?"

"He . . . he was murdered, Pat."

"What?"

"It's true, Pat. I found him on the floor when I got home off my paper route just now. There's blood on his head, and—and—"

I started walking. Fast. Not toward my apartment house just a few doors down the street, but the other way. The kid kept pace with me. I said: "Did you phone a doctor?"

"No. What good's a doctor? He's dead, Pat. I . . . felt him. His pulse, I mean.

Then I came after you. I know you'd be coming home from headquarters about now, and . . . you being a detective sergeant and all, I . . . I thought . . ."

"Okay, okay," I said. Then, as we reached the corner: "What about your sister? Wasn't she home?"

"No. I guess she already left for Moon Garden. She works out there now. Singing with Al Carlin's ork."

"Yeah, so I heard."

Crossing the intersection, he gave me a sideways glance. "You keep an eye on everything she does, don't you, Pat?"

"Skip it."

"I wish she'd married you instead of Rudy."

I stopped at the far curb. "Lay off, punk." I didn't even want to hear Rudy Ferranti's name mentioned. "Now shut up and come on. Quit needling me." We turned the corner and headed for his house, a shabby little cottage on a seedy lot in the middle of the block. I still couldn't bring myself to believe his old man had been murdered. He'd made a mistake somehow, I thought. Nobody would have any motive for killing an inoffensive violin teacher. The kid was nuts. He'd been reading too many detective stories. Or maybe this was his idea of a practical joke.

It was no joke. I found that out the minute I walked into the bungalow's living-room and saw Aaron Harcourt's body sprawled on the floor, face down, the back of his head crushed in from a series of blows.

Harcourt was all through giving music lessons.

**I** WENT through the motions of putting my finger on the artery in his neck. Just a formality. I knew there'd be no pulse-beats. He was still warm, though. He hadn't been dead too long. I crossed the room, picked up the phone, and called headquarters. "Pat Whitney talking," I said. I reported the kill, gave the address, and was told to sit tight; the homicide boys would be right over with a tech squad. I rang off. Then I looked around.



It was no joke. I found that out when I walked into the living-room and found him sprawled out, dead.



Even as upset as it was, the room was familiar. I remembered all the times I'd been in it in the old days, starting away back when we were all kids in grammar school: Barbara, and Al Carlin, and Rudy Ferranti, and myself. Pals, the four of us. Always going places and doing things together. Barbara the skinny, leggy tomboy. Al Carlin the studious one, wanting to be a musician. Me with my mind set on a blue-serge uniform and a badge. And Ferranti the flashy, wiry hellion who swiped oranges and bananas from his father's fruit stand—and shared his loot with the rest of us. Whatever devilry we got into, Ferranti was usually the one who started it.

Yes, this room held memories. Bitter ones for me. I remembered another day I had come here, my first day as a probationary patrolman, showing off my shiny new shield, full of pride because I was finally on the force, a rookie cop. Strutting to make an impression on Barbara, who was no longer a leggy tomboy. I remembered how beautiful she had been that day, remembered how bright her eyes had been, remembered the soft golden sheen of her hair. That was the week Al Carlin got his first professional job with an orchestra. And it was the week Rudy Ferranti had come around flashing a thick roll of bills he'd won in a crap game. Almost a thousand dollars. True, he lost it again a few nights later. But while he had it he made Carlin and myself look pretty small and unimportant. I thing that was when I first began to hate Ferranti. Maybe I sensed, even then, what he would do to me later. What he and Barbara would do to me.

It's odd, how pictures and scenes will dart through your mind when you walk into once-familiar surroundings. This very living room was where I'd asked Barbara to marry me. It was where she had said yes and held out her finger for the ring that had cost me two months' pay. And it was where her father had told me, just a day before the scheduled wedding, that she'd eloped with Rudy Ferranti instead.

So now I was back again. I wasn't a

rookie cop any more, I was a detective sergeant in plain clothes. And Barbara's father was dead in a room that had been torn apart as if by a cyclone. The old man must have put up a terrific struggle before his killer battered him down. The worn rug was bunched, a rocking chair overturned. There was sheet music scattered all over. Ornaments and pictures had been knocked off a desk in a far corner. The place was a shambles.

I PICKED up a double cabinet photo-holder in a hinged leather frame. One side held a picture of four teen-agers taken the day they graduated from high school. The girl was Barbara in her white graduation gown, her first formal. The tall, studious-looking kid with the glasses was Al Carlin. The wiry, swarthy one was Ferranti. The big hulking guy with the lantern jaw and stupid expression was me. In the other frame there was a recent snapshot enlargement of Barbara and Ferranti, man and wife.

I hurled it across the room. It landed near an open violin case that stuck out from under a window drape. The violin case caught my eye. It was a special kind, foreign-made and pretty old. I recognized it and turned to the Harcourt kid, who'd been watching me and not saying anything.

"Where's the fiddle that belongs in this?" I asked him.

His eyes widened. "Gosh, it's gone, isn't it?"

"Seems to be. Take a look around."

He prowled the room, then the rest of the house. He came back pretty quick. "I can't find it, Pat. The one he gave lessons with, that's in the hall closet. But this one—" He screwed up his face. "Any time pop took it out to play it, he always put it back in the case."

But it wasn't there now. A hunch was growing inside me. I remembered the violin Aaron Harcourt had kept in this special case: an instrument he'd never allowed even his own kids to touch. Now and then, on some particular occasion, he would play it himself—but only rarely, and then to the accompaniment of a lec-



*He choked and stiffened and rattled the cuffs.  
His eyes were hot and angry behind the glasses  
he wore.*



ture as to its history. "A genuine Enamieri," he would tell you dreamily. "A real one. Listen to the singing tone. The mellowness. The warmth. Andrea Enamieri, he was one of the great violin makers of Cremona in Italy. A pupil of the master, Nicolo Amati. Yes, Enamieri and the

more famous Antonio Stradavari were fellow-students. Together they learned their art. Today the public knows a good deal about Strad violins, but very little about Enamieri instruments. A pity, too, because in my opinion Enamieri was the better artisan."

He would look at you, then, waiting for the obvious question. Waiting for you to say that this fiddle of his must be mighty valuable. Then he would sadly shake his head. "Valuable to me, yes. But to professional collectors, no. Because the Enamieri signature is not inside." He would hold it up so you could look through the f-shaped holes on each side of the bridge. "Some time in its career it must have had an accident. The original back, with the signature on the inner surface, must have been splintered. It was replaced with this strip of lighter-colored wood. An excellent repair job, you understand. The tone is unimpaired. But that Enamieri signature would have made the difference between a violin worth perhaps a hundred thousand dollars and a concert fiddle you could buy for a thousand. If I were willing to sell for that price. Which I am not."

Time after time I'd seen him run caressing fingers over the Enamieri's repaired back, feeling the smooth patina, touching the imperceptible jointure of ancient dark wood and the lighter strip, a strip whose color reminded me of Barbara's golden hair. I had seen it so many times I knew I would recognize the violin no matter where I encountered it. But it was gone, now. And Harcourt was dead.

Lester blinked at me. "Pat, you think somebody murdered pop for that fiddle?"

"It's a theory."

The kid's lower lip trembled. "Pat, I got to tell you this. I don't want you to think I'm a stool, but—well, I got to tell you. Promise you won't think that I'm just a louzy blabbermouth, hut, Pat?"

"What do you care what I think?"

"Aw, Pat," he said. His voice wasn't steady. "Don't hold it against me because sis married that Ferranti guy. It wasn't my fault she was a damned fool."

"Lay off," I snapped. "I told you I didn't want you to mention him to me. I meant it." I added: "And watch that swearing."

"Sure, Pat, okay. Only—well, I wish you wouldn't be sore at me for something sis did."

"I'm not. I'm not sore at anybody."

HE knew better, of course. He knew how I'd given him the worst of it these past couple of years. He knew I was lying when I said I wasn't sore. Kids are smarter than you give them credit for. He knew it was eating my heart out because Barbara had married Ferranti. He just didn't know how to put his sympathy into words.

"Pat, look," he said. "I got to mention Rudy to you. Just this once. And I'm not ratting. Only after all, it's my pop that's been killed. That makes it different."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"Well, things ain't been going so good with sis and Rudy. All that talk of his about being in the chips, that was a lot of baloney. Half the time he didn't have two nickels to rub together. That was why he and sis came back here to live with Pop and me a couple of months ago. He was busted. Every cent he got his hands on, he dropped it on the ponies. Or dice."

"Get to the point," I said. I didn't enjoy hearing about the impoverished kind of life Barbara had been leading. I knew most of it anyhow. "If you've got anything to say, say it."

He scraped the worn rug with the scuffed toe of his shoe. "Rudy wanted pop to sell that fiddle and lend him the money he'd get out of it. He was all the time nagging him about it. He kept telling pop he could take the dough and run it into a real bankroll in a hot crap game he knew about. Pop wouldn't do it, though. You remember how pop was." The kid's voice choked a little and his eyes went to his old man's body. "Maybe he would have for sis, but not for Rudy. He knew he'd only lose it and be just as broke as ever. So he kept saying no. Rudy got pretty sore a couple times. He got nasty."

"How nasty?"

"Loud-talk nasty. Then sis went to see Al Carlin and landed a job singing with his band, out at Moon Garden. She said if Rudy wouldn't work and earn her a living, it looked like she'd have to do it herself. Rudy didn't like that too much. He spends most of his time out there watching to see that nobody don't make no



passes at her. He blamed it all on pop because he wouldn't sell that violin. And now it's gone."

I studied him. "You're fingering Rudy, are you?"

"I'm just telling you what I know." He was tough again but it was only a cover-up. His lower lip was still trembling. "You make the guesses. You're the cop-per."

"All right," I said. "I'll make the guesses." Not that I had to guess too hard. Everything added up to an inside job. To start with, not too many people had known about old Harcourt's Enamie-ri. That narrowed the field down to his few intimate friends—and his immediate family. In the second place, an ordinary thief wouldn't steal the violin out of its case, he'd take the whole works. But an insider might leave the case behind, closed and latched, hoping the theft wouldn't be discovered right away. Figuring it wouldn't come to light until the next time Harcourt went to take the fiddle out and play it.

Okay. Now suppose the old man walked in, caught the guy taking the instrument from its plush-lined container, recognized him and jumped him. And got killed doing it. Then assume the thief made a hasty getaway, carrying the violin with him but leaving the case behind. Leaving it open, as I'd just found it.

It all meshed with what Lester Harcourt said about Rudy Ferranti. It linked up with the kind of scum I knew he was. I went over to the phone, picked up the directory, leafed through it, located the number of the Moon Garden dance joint, and made the call. "Al Carlin," I said.

The guy at the other end of the wire said Al was leading a number right now and I'd better call back later. I said the hell with that. "This is important. Get him."

Presently Carlin came on the line, his voice modulated and studious as ever. I told him it was Pat Whitney calling and he sounded glad to hear from me. Glad, and a little surprised. I congratulated him on having a dance band of his own and said: "Is Ferranti out there, Al?"

He chuckled. "He's always here when Barbara's on the job. You want to talk to him?"

"Not on the phone," I said. "In person. Be seeing you." I rang off and said to Lester: "I'm going to pick up a taxi and go after him. You stay here until the homicide boys come. Tell them where I went."

He didn't like the idea at all. He wanted to go with me. I had to get pretty hard with him. I told him I needed him like I needed a hole in the head. That wasn't nice to say, but it shut him up. He shuffled across the room, his back to me so I wouldn't see him face. Maybe he was learning hero-worship didn't pay. Maybe he was finding out that cops can be heels.

I went as far as the door. Then I said over my shoulder: "When the guys from headquarters get here, better tell them I want a squad car sent after me."

"Okay, Pat." His voice was sullen.

"And you can come along if they'll bring you," I added. After all, it was only natural he'd want to be around when his father's killer was nabbed.

He turned then. "Thanks, Pat," he said.

His eyes still reminded me of his sister's. Too much. I went out of the house and didn't look back.

**M**OOON GARDEN was on the edge of town, just inside the city limits but a good mile beyond where the subdivision housing developments stopped. It was a rambling, ramshackle eyesore that masked its shabbiness with Neon signs, including a big pale Neon moon over the flat roof. The only thing that put it a cut above a juke joint was Al Carlin's eight-piece orchestra.

I could hear the band braying something brassy as I headed toward the entrance. The music sounded harsh and savage. It matched the way I felt. After two years I was going to see Barbara again. And I was going to put handcuffs on the guy who had taken her away from me. I was going to arrest him. For murder.

Funny how things had worked out, I  
(Continued on page 120)

Illustrated by Newton H. Alfred



By  
**ROBERT  
LESLIE  
BELLEM**

# Treachery Pulls the Trigger

**B**EFORE I knew it, I was boxed in. The tall, skinny bozo sidled at me from the left and the fat guy was suddenly on my right as I ankled toward

my jalopy on the parking lot. "Don't yeeep, flatfoot. Not if you want to live long and stay healthy," the skinny character said out of the side of his kisser. "My



*Dan Turner was startled to discover why the monocled publisher-gambler didn't answer the big detective's questions—the guy was dead, although he looked alive! And from there on in the gumshoe trail became rougher and rougher with bruising bumps!*



*The tiny gat sneezed and planted a pill neatly in the guy's right eyeball.*

porky pal's got a gat and he just loves to perforate private eyes like you. By him it's a habit."

"A bad habit," I said sourly. The mouse-trapping trick they'd pulled on me had been very neat indeed. I had just barged out of Grauman's Chinese after catching a sneak preview, and it never entered my mind that these two plug-uglies were laying for me. They had kept

themselves concealed until the psychological moment, and now they had me with my guard down. Maybe their gun threat was a lot of hogwash, but I didn't feel like testing it by making a dig for my own shoulder-holstered .32 automatic. I might be a fraction slow and wind up with holes in my gilets.

"What's the caper?" I demanded, and kept walking.

The two hoods stayed in step with me, as seemingly friendly as lint sticking to a blue-serge coat. There was nothing in the attitude of either one that would arouse the suspicions of stray witnesses; nobody could possibly guess I was being snatched, and consequently nobody would come to my rescue or even seek the services of a cop. In brief, I realized I was on the hook.

Indignant frustration needled through my nooks and crannies, particularly when I received no answer to my question. I repeated it; switched the phrasing a little. "What is this routine?"

"Gabby, ain't he?" the fat one said.

The thin one nodded his noggin, which was perched on a pipestem neck like a taffy apple on a lollipop stick. "All mouth and a yard wide," he agreed.

I resented that. I may be a yard wide, give or take an inch or two, and I also pack a hundred and ninety pounds of heft on my six-foot-plussage. But I'm not all mouth by a damned sight. I said peevishly: "Slip me the score and I'll clam up. I'm entitled to that much."

"You're entitled to climb in your coupe," the skinny citizen stated in firm tones. "Be nice about it."

"Look. Are you sure you've got the right victim?"

Fatso said: "You're Dan Turner, ain't you?"

"Yeah," I admitted.

"The snoop?"

"That's one name for my profession," I said.

The thin hombre grinned. "I can think of other names. Get in your car, wise guy. You take the middle, Lard on the other side, and me driving." He prodded me into my bucket and the two gunsels sandwiched me as indicated, whereupon we went away from there in a hell of a yank. It began to look as if I might be in the middle in more ways than one.

Still, I hadn't been hurt yet. That was something. Of course my pride was taking a beating; a man with a tough-dick rep like mine hates to get shoved around by a pair of cheap mugs.

SKINNY whooshed my boiler through the night, down the hill to Santa Monica Boulevard; turned right and followed the Pacific Electric car tracks. We passed the Neon-lighted mock Colonial facade of the Kings cafe which specializes in sea food that's out of this world; presently wheeled to the north again on Robertson and parked eventually in front of a large rectangular one-story building of modernistic grey stucco that occupied half a city block in overall dimensions. The thin ginzo said: "All out. End of the line."

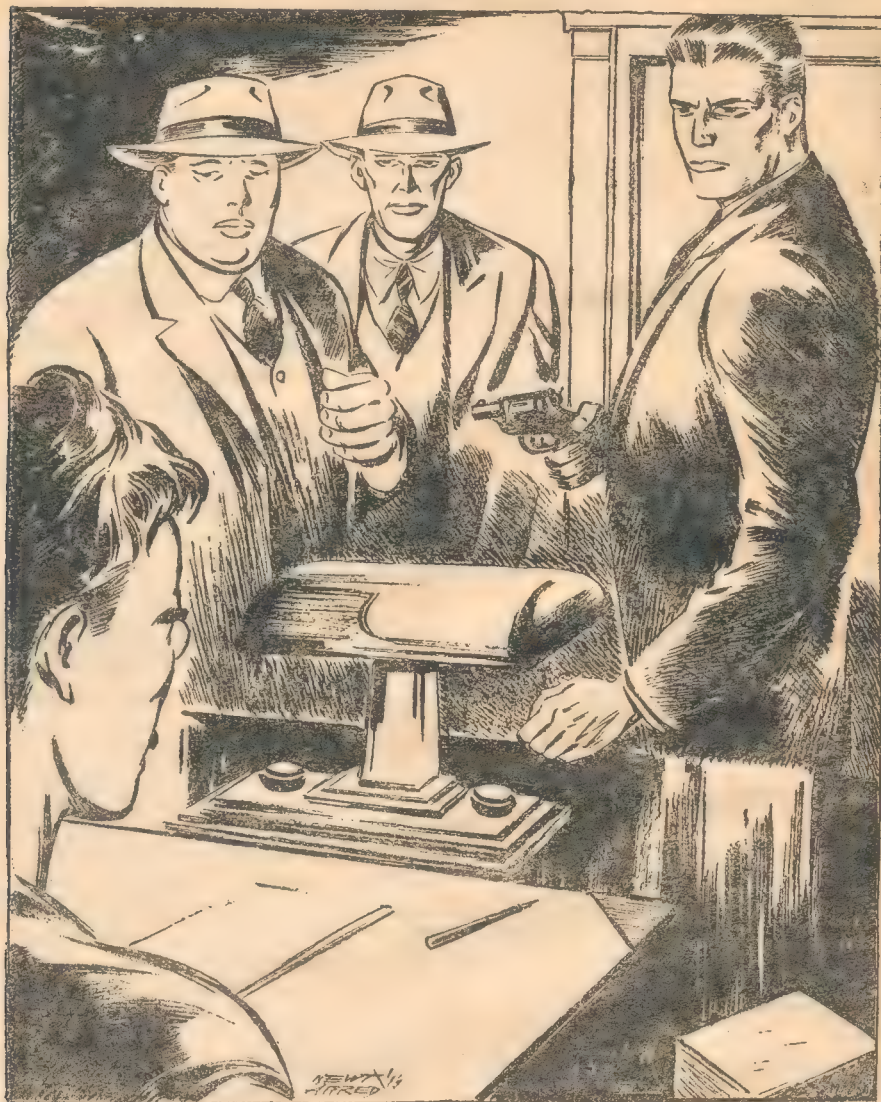
As my brogans hit the sidewalk I copped a gander at the grey stucco joint; tabbed it as the home of Domino Enterprises, a Hollywood magazine-publishing outfit whose secret angel was rumored to be Nick Hardesty, big-shot gambler. At least the gossip along the Sunset Strip said it was Hardesty's dice dough that was backing the venture, although nobody had actually proved this. Nobody bothered to try. What Hardesty did with his winnings was his own affair; if he craved to go bankrupt issuing a string of lurid murder-story pulps, so what?

I noticed all the building's front windows were dark and wondered what the hell would happen next, now that we were here. Privately I had a pretty good idea, but I kept it to myself for the time being. "Okay boys," I said. "What do we do in Reel Two of this corny opus?"

"Slim and me take you inside," Lard said, and moved toward a massive door carved in imitation of Georgian Gothic.

Thus moving, he had his back to me. His thin companion followed along in my wake, and now was the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. The setup suited me exactly. I erupted in a blur of motion, bent down low and propelled myself forward with both arms extended like rams. My palms connected with Fatso's shoulders; drove him violently against the door's solid woodwork. His mush struck the paneling with a nauseous squish that flattened his features as thoroughly as if he'd been remodeled by a steam roller. He dropped





Nick Hardesty sat at the desk, unmoving, impassive as a clothing-store dummy. He didn't look startled as I herded the gunsels in.

and lay quivering, while piteous moans issued from his mauled yapper.

Meanwhile, bouncing backward, I collided with Slim before he could duck aside. My tonnage knocked him staggering, and I whirled around while he was still trying to right himself. "Never toy with a buzz saw," I said. "Let this

be a lesson to you." I smote him in the midriff.

My knuckles sank damned near to his spinal column and he folded in quick pain, like a broomstraw hit by a sledgehammer. A fast uppercut straightened him up again, whereupon I got in close and peered at him critically. "You hurt

bad, chum?" My irony was intended.

His mouth was wide open, gasping for air, revealing his teeth in a foolish, idiotic grin that was more agonized than mirthful. They were good teeth, a trifle yellowish but strong and horsey. I loosened the front ones with a stiff jab and stepped back to survey the damage I'd inflicted. I had done a pretty good job, I decided. The knowledge made me feel fine.

I felt even better when I returned my attention to the fallen Fatso, yanked him upright and frisked a snub-nosed .38 belly gun out of his coat pocket. Brandishing the rod, I favored both characters with a ferocious leer. "Who's top dog now?"

"You are," Lard answered abjectly, wiping his mashed smeller on his sleeve and getting the cuff all crimson with ketchup. "Be careful with that heater. It's got a hair trigger."

"Thanks for telling me. You'd better remember it yourself. If I make my meaning plain," I added darkly.

The skinny one said: "You play too rough."

"I'll play a lot rougher if you try anything stupid," I rasped. "That applies to both of you. And now, before we delve any further into this dizzy scenario, suppose you tell me what cooks. Talk it up and talk it straight."

Fatso did the honors. "There wasn't nothing personal about it, Mr. Turner," he whined. "Slim and me was only following orders."

"Whose orders?"

"Nick Hardesty's. We work for him."

"And he told you to hang the snatch on me?"

"Well, yeah, in a way." Fatso wiped more claret off his pudgy profile. "That is, he said he wanted you brought to him."

I DIDN'T get it. I didn't get any part of it. I'd bucked Hardesty in many a Hollywood floating crap game, sometimes winning an odd sawbuck from him and sometimes losing to him. Either way, we'd never had any bad feelings. We'd been on parties together, got sozzled to-

gether and were on casually friendly terms, not exactly bosom chums but certainly not enemies. If he had wanted to see me it would have been easy enough for him to call me up and say so. Why, then, had he chosen to make with the muscles and send a couple of moronic goons to fetch me the hard way? It didn't add up to make sense.

I said so. In reply, Skinny lifted a skeletal shoulder. "Maybe Nick wanted to let you know he meant business. Serious business. So's you'd be impressed, sort of."

"In that case there'll be a slight backfire," I said. "The impression will be on him. A knuckle impression." I indicated the door. "Unlock that."

He obeyed, and the three of us entered a small reception room, one side of which was clear glass with a circular porthole. Here, during the daylight hours, a combination receptionist and switchboard operator could sit and survey visitors. Now, of course, the layout was dark and deserted. The only light was a reflection from the transverse corridor beyond. This led into a small private bar and lounge which would have looked incongruous in a New York business house but was entirely typical of a Hollywood setup. The bar itself was done in red Chinese lacquer, the ceiling was a fish net, the walls held lighted glass aquaria full of guppies and goldfish, and the chairs were of leather-cushioned wickerware that emphasized modernism rather than comfort. On the far side of the room there was another doorway leading into an office calculated to beat your brains out with its opulent splendor.

The instant I stalked into it I experienced a sensation of active resentment. No lousy pulp publisher deserved such lavish surroundings, least of all a publisher who'd built his bankroll by being professionally lucky with the dice. There was a carpet on the floor that foamed up around your ankles like the thickish, smooth texture of a sponge cake. The wall paneling was bleached mahogany, hand rubbed to a buttery luster. Book-



shelves were countersunk into the north end of the room, a blondewood spinet piano was placed a little to the left of the door as you entered, and dramatically under a bank of frosted windows stood a desk so massive you could have set up housekeeping in it without even removing any of the drawers.

**N**ICK HARDESTY sat at the desk, unmoving, impassive as a clothing-store dummy.

He didn't look startled when I herded Fatso and Skinny over the threshold ahead of me and motion them to a halt when a wave of the roscoe I was toting. Hardesty wasn't a guy to register surprise at anything. He was tall and broad-shouldered in a canary-yellow T-shirt and brown slacks, and his coarse abundant hair was the black of anthracite coal. A straggly dab of mustache separated his small button nose from lips that were sensual and a shade too pale, and in his left glimmer he wore a monocle. Maybe it was the long training of keeping the monocle screwed in place that had taught him such complete control of his facial muscles. He was absolutely deadpan. He would probably have stayed deadpan if the Venus de Milo had come prancing into his office doing a highland fling.

"Now then, Nick," I growled.

He didn't answer me. He didn't stir.

"Don't give me that silent routine," I said bleakly. "Ask me what happened to your two bully boys here. Ask me if an accident happened to them. Then I'll tell you it was no accident; I mussed them up on purpose. And you're due for the same dose unless I get an explanation that sounds plausible."

He looked straight at me and ignored me.

I began to feel tight and tense, inside. A hunch crawled down my spine, nibbled at me with ominous premonitions. Hardesty was not only ignoring me, he was ignoring his two gunsels as well. Poise is okay and aplomb is admirable, but there's a time and place for everything

and the gambler was being too damned calm. Unnaturally calm. Suddenly I realized he wasn't even breathing.

That was because of the small brown hole in the chest of his yellow T-shirt, a hole that was almost concealed by a fold in the cloth and in the flesh under the cloth. It was a clean hole with only a trace of blood around it, but Hardesty had evidently leaked plenty of gravy internally from the gunshot wound. The bullet had been a small one, a .32 or maybe merely a .25 with a high velocity charge. Whatever it was, it had found his heart and stopped its beating. He was deader than minced clams.

**C**ORPSES always give me the fan-tods, particularly when I encounter them unexpectedly. It took me almost a full minute to digest the knowledge that Nick Hardesty was defunct, and thirty seconds more to recover from my abrupt attack of the jim-pams. Then I leaped headlong to the desk, rammed a finger against the artery in the gambler's muscular neck. The artery wasn't pulsating and the skin felt cool; too cool. It wasn't cold and clammy, yet. But it would be, soon enough.

When I took the pressure off his throat, he slumped forward onto the desk top and his monocle dropped out, rolled across the unstained blotter, teetered on the edge, and fell to the floor. Slim and Lard stared as if mesmerized.

I said: "Snap out of it. Don't tell me this is the first time you creeps ever piped a stiff."

"Stiff?" the skinny one gulped noisily, and let his Adam's apple run up and down inside his sinewy gullet. "You mean Nick's—you mean he's d-dead?"

"Yeah. Bumped." I reached past the corpse, lifted a phone out of its cradle, dialed police headquarters and asked for my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad.

Waiting for Dave to get on the line was a mistake, but not my worst one. Much bigger was the blunder I pulled when I finally made connections with

him. The wait gave the two gunsels time to mull things over; and then, as I started talking, I took my glims off my captives. It was only for a brief instant, but in that instant the skinny bozo seized his golden opportunity. He grabbed up a pedestal smoking stand equipped with a demountable ash tray and swung it like a baseball bat, full at my noggin.

Had it connected it would have flailed my brains to cranberry jelly. It didn't connect though. It missed me by a good six inches, like Casey striking out with the bases loaded. Unfortunately the demountable ash tray flew off at the wrong time and accomplished what the pedestal stand failed to do: it tagged me on the jowls, not hard enough to knock me frigid but with sufficient force to rock me back on my heels and dislocate my reflexes. Then, while I was trying to fight off successive waves of dizziness, Skinny made a wild dash around the desk and catapulted himself at the frosted window behind it.

He scored a clean bull's-eye, his head low and his mush covered by his crossed arms, the elbows making a sort of double spearhead. There was a hell of a crash as the glass shattered and sprayed outward, the bony guy going out with the flying shards. A professional stunt man couldn't have done it better.

AS HE vanished, I snapped out of my apathy and tried to wing him a shot from the snub-nosed .38 belly gun which I'd glommed from Fatso a few minutes before. I would have had a lot better luck with my own personal .32 automatic, but it was clipped in its shoulder holster under my left armpit; whereas the .38 was already in my unsteady fist. When you're in a tight spot you don't stop to think about selecting your hardware; if you've got any choice at all you take whatever's handiest. The trouble was, I forgot that Fatso had warned me his gat had a hair trigger. Without taking aim, I raised it and fired.

The cannon sneezed a premature *Ka-Chow!* before I could get a bead on the rapidly disappearing skinny bozo. My

line of fire was all haywire. Instead of hitting Slim I put a slug through the deceased Nick Hardesty's steeple, which made the top of his haircut look very messy indeed but didn't render him any deader than he already was. Then I had the dubious privilege of lamping Skinny dropping outside the window and running like jet propulsion. He was long gone before I could collect my scattered wits and slam another bullet after him. Where he had been an instant before there was now nothing but the fractured window pane.

My jaw was throbbing like a gastric ulcer where the ash tray had caught me, my glims were out of focus, and I felt like the wrath of Whozit. I turned and fastened the bleary glimpse on Fatso. "If you so much as look as if you'd like to lam I'll blast you apart and scatter your clockworks all over the precinct," I grated in a threatening manner.

"Who, me?" he whined, and turned eleventeen shades of pallid. "Gosh, Mr. Turner, I wouldn't think of doing nothing as foolish as that."

"Your pal did," I snarled.

"Can I help it if he got boogery? I don't have to do everything he does." Then he added virtuously: "Besides, I ain't got no reason to take a powder."

"Neither did he."

Fatso made a thoughtful mouth. "You could be wrong about that, Mr. Turner."

"Meaning what?" I said. "Are you hinting he had anything to do with this kill?" I indicated Hardesty's husk.

The fat slob spread his hands elaborately. "I didn't say that. I didn't say nothing like that at all."

"Okay. You indicated Slim had a good reason for scrambling. Do you want to tell me voluntarily what that reason was or must I extract the information by brute strength?"

"Hey, nix. You already showed me how tough you are, out there when you shoved me up against the front door." He massaged his injured nostrils. "I'll talk. I'll tell you anything you wanna know. Just name it."



*A professional stunt man couldn't have gone through that glass more skillfully than the bony guy did.*



I said: "Why did your skinny pal powder?"

"On account of he's hotter than a depot stove. I mean he done five years of a ten-spot stretch in San Q for a heist job he pulled, and then they turned him loose on parole. He was supposed to be going straight, see, only instead of going straight he hooked up with Nick Hardesty, here, and, well, I mean, that was bad. It was a strongarm job, sort of. You know, like lumping up guys that

didn't pay their gambling debts. Stuff like that. Illegal."

"Oh, very," I agreed through a deep sneer.

Fatson went on: "Somehow the word got out that Bergstrom, that's his monicker, Skinny Bergstrom, I say, somehow the word passed out that Skinny wasn't keeping his nose clean. So naturally his parole officer got wind of it. Which mean the cops were on his tail. There was a pickup reader out on him.

If he should get nabbed, they'd shove him back in San Q to do the other five years of his ten spot. He knewed it. So I guess when he seen Hardesty was croaked and you was about to phone for some law, he figured he was behind the eight ball. The minute the bulls tabbed him he would of got collared. Well, that's how I dope it out. I mean it looks like he couldn't risk sticking around here, so he done the natural thing and lammed."

FATSO'S summing-up sounded reasonable. I accepted it with one or two mental reservations and pretended I was completely satisfied. "So much for that," I said. "Next we take up the matter of Hardesty's violent demise. If you don't think Skinny Bergstrom's the guy that killed him, then who did?"

"Damn if I know. It could have been lots of people. I mean, you know where Hardesty got his dough."

"Sure. Dice."

"Yeah. He didn't run no regular gambling club or nothing like that. Just floating games, here and there. For big chips. He done a lot of business with movie hot shots. Stars and directors and producers and so forth. Sometimes he lose to them, just to keep them happy, but mostly he win. He piled himself up quite a wad of jack these last couple years."

I nodded. "Enough to finance this publishing venture. And so what?"

"Well, they was some of the suck—I mean the guys he win off of—"

"Call them suckers. It's all right by me."

"Yeah, well, lately they was some of them that got to yelping about maybe Hardesty's dice was too educated. That is, they sorta thought he was switching and using shavers or tops. A lot of them jerks dropped plenty moolah to Nick and he was holding their markers, you know, I O U's, and it was getting so it was kind of hard to collect."

I said: "In other words, some of his victims figured they had been jobbed, so they refused to pay off."

"Right. Which was why Hardesty hired Skinny and me to put on the pressure. I mean we was muscle men. That is, if some yuck didn't kick in with what he owed, why Bergstrom and me would go call on him and sort of persuade him. After all, a gambling debt is a gambling debt and nobody never proved Hardesty was using no trick dice."

"That's beside the point," I said. "The thing is, you and Skinny Bergstrom were doing Hardesty's dirty work; pushing his suckers around."

"Yeah."

"And you think it might have been one of the people you pushed around who got even with Nick by cooling him off."

"It sounds sensible, don't it?"

"Could be," I said. "But where do I fit in the script? Why did Hardesty want me kidnaped and brought to him?"

"So's he could warn you off."

"Warn me off? I don't get it. Make it plainer."

Fatso widened his optics at me. "Ain't you been retained by a jessie which owed Nick money?"

"No," I said truthfully. "What jessie?"

"That there movie star, Lorine Duvall. You know."

I said I knew of Lorine Duvall but had never met her personally. She was a diminutive brunette French cutie who'd been imported to Hollywood by Metrovox Pix, a sultry little spitfire whose first American production had clicked in a large way, thereby skyrocketing her to the top of the heap. I'd heard rumors that she'd acquired the gambling fever in Nice, Cannes and Monte Carlo and that she continued to indulge the habit in this country; but beyond that, I knew absolutely nothing about her. "What's with the Duvall chick?" I said.

"Why, she was one of the pigeons Nick took to the cleaners for considerable scratch," the fat gunsel said. "But instead of paying off, she balked. Nick sent Skinny and me to toss a scare in her—just a scare," he added defensively. "We wouldn't use no strong arm stuff on a dame," his voice was pious.



"And?"

"She didn't scare worth a damn. In fact, she said she was going to hire you to get some deadwood on Nick and run him out of Hollywood. Nick didn't like that. I ain't saying he was afraid you would turn up some evidence proving he was crooked, understand. I'm only saying he didn't like the idea of no private shamus investigating him. So he phoned Skinny and me to pick you up and bring you here for a showdown, sort of. He was going to warn you to lay off and not take the French quail's case or you might wake up in a wooden kimona."

"Oho," I said, sore as a picked blister. "He thought he could order me around, hey? And now he's the one that'll wear the mahogany kimona. Serves him right. I'm not a damned bit sorry I shoved that bullet through his skull."

Behind me, Dave Donaldson lumbered into the office and rasped: "So you admit blasting him, do you, Sherlock? That's just fine. I heard you confessing, and suppose you stick out your fins for the nippers. You're under arrest for murder."

I WHEELED, fixed the flabbergasted swivel on him, and wondered how the hell so much dumbness could be wrapped up in one homicide lieutenant. Here he had ankled onto the scene just in time to overhear me alluding to the slug I'd accidentally put in Nick Hardesty's defunct conk, and right away he leaped to the conclusion that I was the guilty gee; the killer. It would have been funny except that he was in grim earnest. Friendship or no friendship, he really intended to salt me down in the bastille on a bumpy rap. He figured he had me dead to fists.

Of course when you analyzed the situation you could understand why he was going off half cocked. First I'd phoned him; but before I got a chance to tell him about discovering Nick Hardesty's cadaver, Skinny Bergstrom had bunted me with an ash tray and knocked me loose from my common sense. I had dropped the telephone, whereupon all

Donaldson heard over the wire was the crash of breaking glass and the shot I'd fired at the escaping guy.

Being a copper, Dave had naturally put a tracer on the open phone connection; located this address. He had then piled into his official wagon and flagged his diapers to the source of my interrupted call, arriving just in time to catch the tail end of my remarks and misinterpret them.

In a way, some of this was my own fault. What with the excitement and one thing or another, I'd completely forgotten the open phone. I was so interested in questioning Fatso that I'd never completed my bleat to headquarters. And now Donaldson was informing me I was pinched.

"Don't be screwy," I told him. "The whole thing is a mistake. I—"

He beetled his brows at me and strode truculently forward, an irate glitter in his glimmers. "Screwy, am I? A mistake, huh? Do you mean to tell me that's not a corpse behind that desk?"

"It's a corpse, all right. But—"

"With a hole in the head?"

"Yeah—"

"A bullet hole?"

"Sure, but—"

"And didn't I hear you say you fired the bullet that made the hole?"

"Yes," I yeepped desperately. "But dammit—"

"Don't feed me any but-dammit. I'm trundling you down to the gow, savvy? You can try and sell your sheepdip to a jury, but lay off sprinkling it on me. I'm not buying."

"Now wait," I said. "In the first place the pill I put through Hardesty's conk didn't kill him."

He favored me with a supercilious leer. "Didn't kill him, eh? I suppose he's just asleep. If I lissen hard enough, I'll hear him snore."

"No," I said. "He's dead enough. I'll admit that. But—"

Dave climbed swiftly to the top of a towering dudgeon. "Damn your brass, quit weaseling!" his roar cut across my attempted explanation. Crimson suffused

his beefy features and he seemed verging on a stroke of apoplexy. Fire and brimstone were in the glare he gave me, and steam came out of his ears. "Hold out your wrists for the handcuffs!" And he whisked the bracelets from his hip pocket, lunged toward me.

WELL, what the hell, I thought. In a spot like that, resignation was the better part of valor. When a guy's temper is burning at both ends and the middle, you can't reason with him. If the guy is a homicide bull like Donaldson it's even worse; all an argument will get you is your elbows tossed in the municipal pokey. I knew I could explain everything to his complete satisfaction as soon as he quit seething; and the fastest way to reduce his boiling point was to let him slap the cuffs on me. I thrust forth my mitts, as meek as a missionary in a cannibal's kettle. "Okay, pal. Have fun now and apologize later," I said.

He started to hang the irons on me, turning his back to Fatso. This was extremely bad judgment. Fatso, who had been totally ignored up to that moment, now took a hand in the game. Or rather, he took a foot. He swung his right brogan like a collegian kicking a field goal; booted Dave full in the rear and lifted him ten inches off the floor.

The thing happened so unexpectedly it petrified me. Dave let out an anguished squawk, as loud as a tomcat with its tail in the meat grinder. He rose in the air, came down, pivoted, and clapped both hands to the seat of his blue serge trousers where the pain was. As he performed this complicated maneuver, Fatso stooped low and charged; rammed his head into Dave's elly-bay. Crying loudly to heaven that his gall bladder was ruptured, Dave fell to the rug and became unconscious.

As he dropped, I snapped out of my horrified trance and leaped at the porky guy. "You damned fool!" I yammered, and got hold of his throat. "What the hell did you do that for? Now we're both in the grease!"

"Gosh, Mr. Turner, I had to," he blub-

bered. "That copper was pinching you, wasn't he?"

"Sure, but—"

"And you really did put a slug in Hardesty's brains."

"Hardesty was defunct when I did that," I said. "Your testimony would have backed me up on it and cleared me."

"Not mine. The minute them identification experts found out I was John J. Volmer, alias Lard, alias Fatso, alias a lot of other monickers, why, they wouldn't believe me if I took my oath on a stack of wheatecakes. I got a record as long as an old maid's dream, I have. Not that I'm wanted for nothing right now, but you know how cops are with an ex-con. No sir, my testimony wouldn't of helped you none, Mr. Turner. I seen you was in a jackpot, and I done what was necessary."

I cursed him fervently. "An autopsy on the corpse would prove Hardesty was dead when I drilled him, you idiot. Donaldson wouldn't have kept me in jail more than a few hours. But now—" I choked as I pictured what would happen when Dave revived. He'd claim I was in cahoots with Fatso, that the assault had been my scheme; he would charge both of us with resisting arrest, attacking an officer of the law, mayhem, arson and mopey.

Fatso Volmer said: "Then I guess we better do what I figured we'd do when I buttered him to dreamland."

"You mean scream?"

"Yeah. While we still got the chance. Before he wakes up and starts throwing his weight around."

I thought it over, disliked it thoroughly, and decided it was the only sensible thing to do. Otherwise we'd both get juggled until we grew long white whiskers.

Moreover, by lighting a shuck for freedom now, I'd have an opportunity to do some private detecting. I might even be lucky and find a clue to Hardesty's killer. If I cracked the case and handed it to Donaldson on a silver platter, letting him take full credit, he would probably





*Fatso stooped low and charged; rammed his head into Dave's belly, knocking him to the rug.*

re-install me in his good graces. "Okay, Fatso," I said. "Let's ramble."

"Now you're talking," his tone held admiring approval as he followed me toward the doorway. "We'll go somewhere and hole up until the heat's off, and—"

"You can hole up," I said. "Me, I'm going to work."

He kept step with me to the building's front door. "You mean snooping?"

"Yes." We barged out onto the sidewalk. "Goodbye, please. If I never see you again it'll be too soon."

"Aw, don't be like that, Mr. Turner," he said woefully. "You hadn't ought to talk to me like that. I like you."

I made for my jalopy parked at the curb. "Beat it."

"Nix," he said, his pudgy pan puckering. "I want to string along with you. Look, I ain't got no job no more, now that Nick's been croaked. Couldn't you use me for a assistant, sort of? I'd work cheap."

"Get away from me," I said, and slid in under the wheel; kicked the starter. "Roll your hoop."

He hopped on my running board and clung there like a fat bug. "All I'd ask you for is eating money, Mr. Turner. Not no regular salary. And you'd be surprised how useful I am. I can run errands and mix drinks and press pants and—why, gosh, I can even cook." He thrust his head in the window. "Aw, please."

Maybe it was the hero worship in his peepers that got me; after all, I'm as human as the next guy when it comes to soaking up flattery. Or maybe it was just his woebegone expression. Anyhow, I said: "Hop in, damn it. You're breaking my heart." And as soon as he settled his tonnage alongside me, I went away from that vicinity in a cloud of waffle batter.

**W**HEELING at top velocity, I also notched my think-tank into high gear; studied the situation from all angles. Presently a notion hit me. It was only a hunch, but it had possibilities. "So you want to be useful, do you?"

Fatso nodded violently. "Yeah, I sure do."

"Okay, you can start by giving me an address."

"Whose, Mr. Turner?"

"That French wren's."

"What French wren?"

"Lorine Duvall," I said. "The Metro-vox star."

He blinked at me. "Her? What for do you want her address?"

"Look," I said. "Didn't you tell me she was one of Nick Hardesty's dice suckers?"

"Yeah."

"She owed him dough and refused to pay off, right?"

"Yeah. Fifteen G's, all told."

I said: "So Hardesty sent you and Skinny Bergstrom to call on her, threaten her."

"That's right, Mr. Turner. Only she didn't scare worth a damn. She just got up on her high horse and said she was going to retain you to get some dead-wood on Nick."

"Which she didn't do," I said. "Maybe she changed her mind and decided to take matters in her own hands."

"You mean maybe she drilled him?"

"That's the general theory. It's only a theory, though."

He sounded excited. "Gosh, I see what you're getting at. She barges in on him for a showdown and he's sitting there not expecting nothing violent, just going over his accounts receivable, and she ups with her little .25 Spanish and puts a plug in his ticker, and walks out again as cool as go-to-hell. Do you think you could make it stick?"

"I'm not even sure it's a reasonably accurate facsimile of how it happened," I said. "But it's worth looking into. Now tell me her address."

He mentioned a swanky apartment on Wilshire and I headed in that direction under forced draft; presently dragged anchor ferninst the edifice in question. With Fatso wheezing along in my wake I boarded an automatic elevator which wafted us up to the sixth floor and spewed us out into a quiet, deeply-carpeted corridor. Here the pudgy bozo took the lead; guided me to the door of Lorine Duvall's sumptuous stash. I knuckled the portal, trying to make it sound like a cop's knock: brisk and peremptory, with a lot of authority behind it.

A sleepy-looking maid answered, after I'd rapped three times more. She was a buxom blonde with a Scandinavian mush and copious curves under her negligee and nightie. "Yes, what is it?" she asked me.

I gave her a brief flash at my special badge. "Police business," I lied. "I want to see Miss Duvall. Pronto."



"Miss Duvall isn't home."

I bulled my way inside, gestured Fatso to follow and told him to shut the door. "Okay, gorgeous," I said to the maid. "If Miss Duvall isn't home, we'll wait for her. If you're lying, trot her out and make it rapid."

"I'm not lying," she bridled. "You can search the apartment if you want to."

I said: "I'll take your word," and broke open a fresh deck of coffin nails; set fire to one. Then I settled my heft on a nearby davenport, made myself comfortable. "In case your hospitality suggests that you offer me a snort, I'll take Scotch. Preferably Vat 69 if you've got some."

"I have not. And I wouldn't give it to you if I had. I'm not in the habit of furnishing liquor to every policeman that forces himself in here."

I blew a smoke ring on my second try. For me, that was par for the course. "You talk as if policemen made a practice of forcing themselves in the wigwam, girlie."

"To night they do."

I stiffened. "Meaning I'm not the first?"

"As if you didn't know," she sniffed.

I wondered if Dave Donaldson had awakened from his swoon and somehow stumbled onto the Duvall muffin's connection with Hardesty. Had Dave put two and two together, as I myself had done? And had he then despatched one of his underlings here to interview the French quail?

"So there was another dick ahead of me," I said to the blonde maid. "How long ago?"

"About thirty minutes or so."

This puzzled me more than ever. It ruled Donaldson out of the picture. "This thing is getting wacky," I said.

The maid said "That's what I think. I'd like to know what it all means. Why are you cops so anxious to see Miss Duvall? What's she done?"

"I'll ask the questions," I growled evasively. "Tell me, who was the cop that came here?"

"He said his name was Sergeant Bergstrom."

When I heard that name I damned near swallowed my gasper, ashes and all. "Bergstrom! Describe him."

"Well, he was tall, and thin, and—"

"Did he have big yellow teeth, like a horse?"

"Yes."

"Round head and thin neck, like an apple on a stick?"

"Yes, that's him."

Fatso's glims bulged like squeezed grapes and he looked flabbergasted. "It was Skinny!" he said explosively. "But what was he doing here?"

Quick thinking gave me a possible answer. "Maybe he added up the situation the same as I did," I said. "Maybe he doped it out that the Duvall cookie cooled Hardesty. Or else he figured maybe she would have a line on the guilty party, if she wasn't the killer herself. So as soon as he escaped from me by crashing through Hardesty's office window, he came here to do some checking."

"But why?" Fatso persisted. "After he made his getaway, what would he want to stick his beak into a murder mess for? That was just asking for trouble."

I said: "Misguided loyalty, perhaps. He was on parole. Jobs don't come easy to ex-cons; you know that. Well, Nick Hardesty had given him a chance to earn a living. It wasn't exactly within the law, but at least it was a job. So when Nick got croaked, maybe Skinny thought he ought to track down the murderer. Motive, vengeance."

The maid was staring at us, wide-eyed, listening to the dialogue and turning as white as a Ku Klux costume. "M-muh-murder?" she gasped. "There's b-buh-been a murder? And you s-suh-suspect Miss Duvall—?" She sank into a chair. "Oh, my g-guh-goodness—and I t-tuh-told that thin man where to find her—!"

"You what?" I yodeled.

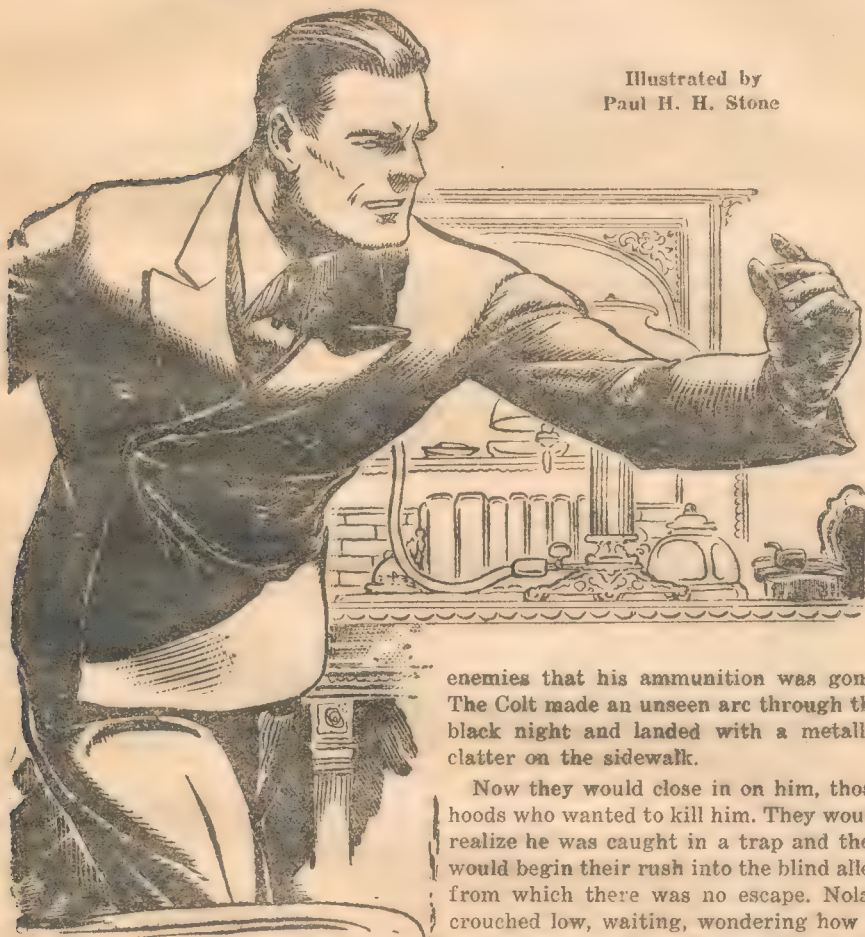
She bobbed her golden noggin. "I told him Miss Duvall was making some extra scenes on her new picture tonight, over

(Continued on page 125)

# GLASS FOR

*With a flock of vicious hood gunmen out to nail him, Detective Sergeant Nolan decided grimly it'd take more than some of those tricks he'd learned in a war to make his life safe—and particularly so with this other ironic angle complicating it. . . .*

Illustrated by  
Paul H. H. Stone



**T**HE gun bucked and stuttered in John Nolan's fist, spewing a burst of slugs as only a Colt .45 can spit them. He held the trigger down until the whole clip had been spent, then hurled the empty weapon out of the alley in a gesture that couldn't help telling his

enemies that his ammunition was gone. The Colt made an unseen arc through the black night and landed with a metallic clatter on the sidewalk.

Now they would close in on him, those hoods who wanted to kill him. They would realize he was caught in a trap and they would begin their rush into the blind alley from which there was no escape. Nolan crouched low, waiting, wondering how it was going to end, wondering if the trick he had used so successfully against infiltrating Japs on a certain island in the South Pacific would be as successful now.

In a way, this alley into which he had been driven wasn't too different from a foxhole. It was the same in principle, at least. And his luck was holding now as it



# GALLARDO

By HARLEY L. COURT

had held in the Solomons. Then, thanks to keen senses and an instinct for self-preservation, he'd been fast enough to take shelter when the attack came. That same intuition was serving him tonight. Walking along a deserted street, he had seen, from the corner of his eye, a black

sedan drifting up behind him. Impulsively he had ducked into the alley at his elbow, just as three guys boiled out of the sedan and started shooting at him.

Well, thus far they hadn't hit him. And he'd kept them safely away with the rapid fire of his .45. Now, though, with the

*In an abrupt change of mood, she darted to the front door. "Killer!" she choked out, twisting the knob.*



automatic discarded, he was a sitting pigeon.

"They think!" he muttered wryly to himself.

Hunkering down, he pressed his sinewy body against the clamminess of the brick wall and made himself as small a target as possible. He was breathing shallowly, nostrils distended, heart hammering the way it always did when he was in a bullet jackpot. "Come on, suckers," he whispered silently.

They came. He saw two vague silhouettes at the alley's mouth, moving with caution but moving toward him. The third hood was evidently staying close to the sedan, out of Nolan's view. Grinning, Nolan set himself for the payoff.

He started firing with his second gun, the gun his assailants didn't know he had.

This time, though, he didn't tie down his trigger. He spaced his shots, and the slow barking explosions were a symphony in his ears. A man grunted. Another man screamed, weirdly. The upright silhouettes were gone now. Instead there were two shapeless blotches on the alley paving, blotches that squirmed and rolled and made floundering noises, rough and scraping against concrete. John Nolan sent lead toward the movement.

The screams stopped.

But the grunts became groans and a flopping shadow dragged itself to the street, inching along like a trodden worm. Nolan fired again and was pretty sure he hadn't missed. Stooping and weaving, he ran forward. Then he made a miscalculation. He stumbled over a yielding, inert form, tripped and fell sprawling. The impact of the fall briefly dazed him.

He heard footfalls going away, one set dragging, one set hard and hurried. Car doors opened and slammed shut, and a motor roared, and tires hummed as they tried for traction and found it. The black sedan was nowhere to be seen when Nolan got back on his feet and ran out of the alley. He cursed.

LATER, when he returned to the guy he had shot and looked at him in the glow of a flashlight, he cursed even more bitterly. He hadn't killed the hood; he had only put one bullet through his upper thigh and another through his spine, practically severing it. The man might live, but he would never walk again. Nolan left him in the alley and went to the nearest corner police call box. He rang the precinct station and said: "This is Plainclothes Sergeant Nolan. Three torpedoes cut down on me a minute

ago while I was on my way home. Vector Street between Tenth and Grove. They were in a black sedan and I didn't see the pads. One guy's in the alley at the middle of the block. Send an ambulance for him. He may still be alive when it gets here, though I question it. He's Luigi Santori that used to run with Vince Gallardo's mob. The others scrambled, but one of them has a hole in him somewhere. That's all. I'm not sticking around. I'm off duty and I'm going home."

He hung up, closed the box and walked away, scowling. He knew he ought to stay until a squad car got here, but there were other things he wanted to do. More important things. He could explain to his superiors later, if they questioned him. He didn't think they would question him—if his plans worked out.

His house was four blocks farther along, down near the waterfront in a district which once had been residential but which now was given over mostly to warehouses and factories and some scattered tenements. Nolan's father had left it to him years ago, and he had lived in it ever since. It was a three-story brick eyesore, a relic of the city's younger days when people burned gas instead of electricity, drove horses instead of automobiles, and lived quietly instead of feverishly. Nolan liked the house. He liked it because it was solid and substantial. It was something that would wait unchanged while you were gone to the wars, and be there when you got back. It was dependable in a world of cynicism and confusion, of cross and double-cross, of corruption and bitterness and killers who struck in the dark.

NOLAN got out his key and started to open the front door, and then a girl came running to him out of the night; a girl in dark clothes that made her part of the shadows. "Johnny!" she said. It was little more than a whisper, but it carried.

He swung around, his eyes narrowed. His left hand was in his coat pocket, bulging around the gun there.

"Johnny!" the girl repeated, and came



closer. "It's me. It's me, Johnny. It's Maria."

Nolan's jaw muscles clamped and his heart began to pound. He opened the door of his house and stood with his back to the vestibule.

"Johnny, don't you know me?" the girl said, and stood near enough for him to see her face, see the shining golden casque of her hair. Compared to his rangy tallness she was diminutive, you might almost say doll-like, but she was a woman. She was all woman, with a woman's mature curves. "Johnny, it's me," she whispered. "It's Maria."

He nodded to let her know he remembered. That was the trouble: he remembered too well and too poignantly. But he didn't tell her that. "What is it you want?" he said woodenly.

"I've got to see you, Johnny. Now. Right away."

"You're seeing me."

"I've got to talk to you."

"You're talking to me."

"I mean alone," she said with a sort of desperation, as if trying to penetrate the barrier and telescope the figurative distance he was placing between them.

His voice was remote. "We're alone."

"Not here, Johnny. Not on the street. Take me inside, Johnny. Take me inside your house."

Once, a long time ago, she could have had that house and John Nolan along with it. Her name had been Maria Gallardo, then. Daughter of Vince Gallardo who ran the city's rackets and ruled its underworld mobs. Golden-haired, naive daughter of a swarthy gangland chief-tain. She hadn't even known that her father was in the rackets.

Nolan had been in love with her, then. A crazy thing, a policeman falling in love with a mobster's kid. But he never realized how crazy it was until, by a freakish twist of chance, he got the goods on Gallardo where other cops had failed. Of all the dicks on the force it had to be John Nolan who arrested Vince Gallardo and supplied the incriminating evidence.

He remembered how it had been. He remembered Maria coming to him, accus-



*The two squirming blotches rolled and made floundering noises. Nolan sent lead toward the movement.*

ing him of having courted her so he could close in on her father. He had denied this, because it wasn't true. Then she had challenged him with: "Prove it, Johnny. You've got to make your choice. If you send my dad to prison, I'll never marry you. I couldn't. I'd hate you, Johnny."

There was only one answer an honest cop could make. Duty came first, before anything else. He'd sent Gallardo to prison and, in consequence, lost the girl he loved. There would never be any other girl, he thought, looking at her now. He wished she hadn't come to him tonight. He wished she hadn't asked him to invite her into his house.

But because of the urgency in her voice, the pleading of her eyes, he gestured her over the threshold and into the old-fashioned parlor. He lighted the Welsbach gas mantels in the chandelier and faced her in the white glow they made. His silence was an unasked question.

"Do you know why I'm here, Johnny?" she nervously broke that silence.

HE made a bitter mouth. "I know your old man was released two weeks ago. I know he's back in town. And I know that three separate attempts have been

made on my life since he got out of stir. Mob attacks. Tonight they came damned close to getting me. I suppose that's what you've got on your mind, isn't it?"

"That's some of it, Johnny. You think my father is putting you on the spot, don't you?"

"There's nothing else I *can* think. I remember at the trial—when he was sentenced. You were there; you remember it, too. The threats he made to get even with me when he served his stretch in the big house. Well, he's out now. And ever since he got out, the heat's been on me."

"I know that, Johnny."

"I thought you did. You might also like to know I knocked off one of the gunsels that tried to bushwhack me a while ago. He was Luigi Santori. One of your father's old torpedoes. I crippled him for life—if he lives. He may not."

"Johnny," she said gently. "I want you to go away."

"You want what?"

"I want you to leave. Before it's too late."

He grinned at her, mirthlessly. "I'm not a guy to run from an enemy."

"Not even if I . . . went with you, Johnny?"

"Now wait a minute," his tone was suddenly harsh. "Let's skip that kind of talk. In the first place, you're married. You're Mrs. Mike Drummond, remember? Maybe you did it to spite me or maybe you fell for the guy, but the fact remains you married Mike Drummond. Your father's right-hand man in the rackets, back in the old days. Keep it clean."

She came very close to him, so near that he could smell the perfume she wore. It stirred him, as it always had stirred him. A scowl darkened his lean face. She ignored the scowl and looked up into his eyes. "Johnny, I'm offering myself to you. I want to go away with you. I want to forget I ever married Mike. I want to forget everything that's happened. I want us to start all over. As if the past eight years had never been."

He was not tempted. He wouldn't let himself be tempted. There was something he had to do, something he had planned

to do ever since the attack on him tonight in that alley. Ever since he had recognized Luigi Santori, the man he had shot through the spine, and realized that his assailants were members of the old Gallardo gang.

From that moment, he had known it was Gallardo who was after him. Motive, vengeance. There was no evidence to support this. It was only surmise. But Nolan didn't need any more than that. When you didn't intend to make an arrest or take a prisoner to court, you didn't have to collect data to convince a jury. It was a personal thing as far as Nolan was concerned. Personal between himself and Gallardo.

Maria said: "Johnny, I love you. I've always loved you. Even though you sent my father up the river. It was your job. I understand that now. At the time I thought I hated you. I was wrong. I married Mike Drummond to spite you, like you said. And I'm sorry. I want to make it up to you, Johnny. We can go away together. We can—"

"Stop it!" he growled. He knew he could have taken her in his arms and kissed her; he knew he could have done as he pleased. It was in her eyes. Surrender. And the only coin she asked in payment was his cowardice. She wanted him to go away with her, so that her father wouldn't get a chance to kill him. It was her way of trying to stop her dad from becoming a murderer.

John Nolan also had a way of doing that, a better way, more effective and more permanent.

HE walked over to one of the few modern things in his house, a telephone. Riffing through the directory, he found the number he wanted; it was under the D's. He dialed it and was talking presently to Mike Drummond.

Drummond had a deep, pleasantly resonant voice that registered well on the wire. "Hello?"

"Drummond?" Nolan asked.

"Yes. Who's this calling?"

"John Nolan. Maybe you remember me."



*Nolan took deliberate aim and shot the fleeing man through the head. The man pitched on his face and the .32 dropped.*



"Yes, I do." Drummond sounded puzzled. "What's—?"

"Then maybe you remember my address, too. I want you to come here and get your wife."

"My wife? Is Maria—?"

"She's here and she's bothering me."

Nolan rang off and turned to the girl. "I think that's the best way out."

For a long moment she seemed too stunned for speech. Finally she whispered: "Johnny, you fool, you fool, you don't know what you've done!"

"But I do. I've asked your husband to come here and get you. That's my answer to your suggestion that we run away together. I hope I've made it clear."

"Johnny!" she said in a small, stricken voice. "You've thrown away our last

chance—our only chance for happiness—” Then, in an abrupt change of mood, she darted to the front door. “Killer!” she choked out, and twisted the knob.

He went after her, but he was too slow. She got away from him and was gone, slamming the door behind her before he could reach out his hand to stay it. When he opened it again and ran to the street he couldn't see her. He could only hear her pattering footsteps, the high heels drum-beating an irregular tattoo on the hollow-sounding sidewalk.

Well, he thought, so much the better. It was odd, though, the way she had called him “killer.” Almost as if she'd read his mind, divined his secret thoughts. Maybe she had finally realized that when criminals war with cops it was like any other kind of warfare. Slay or be slain. No quarter asked, no quarter given. He walked back into his house and busied himself reloading his second automatic. He hadn't much time, he reflected. Maria might even now be on her way to warn her father.

The doorbell rang.

Nolan, frowning, answered it. He wanted no interruptions now. He was in a hurry. He pocketed the loaded gun, went to the door and opened it. Mike Drummond was standing on the front stoop, facing him.

“Hello, Nolan,” Drummond said. “You say Maria's here?”

“She was. She isn't now. You got here pretty fast.”

“Drove over right away, soon as you phoned.”

Drummond was the typification of the black Irish, tall, square-jawed, square-shouldered, hair as coarse and sleek as a Sioux Indian's, mouth upturned and friendly. Ever since the break-up of Vince Gallardo's gang, Drummond had reputedly been going straight. He had a produce brokerage business and a piece of a contracting concern, and his hoodlum days were behind him according to his dossier down at headquarters. He dressed well and drove a navy blue Pack-

ard sedan. It was parked at the curb in front of Nolan's house.

“Drove over right away,” Drummond repeated. “Where'd she go?”

“I don't know.”

“What was she doing here? What did she want?”

“It was personal.”

**D**RUMMOND said evenly: “When a man's wife calls on another man she used to be sweet on. the hell with that personal stuff. I asked you a question, Nolan. I think I've got an answer coming.”

“All right, maybe you have,” Nolan said. “I'm not a guy who'd come between husband and wife. Maria wanted to warn me, was all.”

“Warn you?”

“Her old man is trying to put me on the spot. She wanted me to duck out of town.”

Drummond seemed appeased. “You going to?”

“No.”

“Maybe you should,” Drummond said reflectively. “Vince is my father-in-law and I guess I oughtn't ought to talk about him, but—”

“But what?”

“He's mean medicine,” Drummond said. “And I've heard him telling it around he's out to get you. But good.”

“Unless I get him first,” Nolan's voice was unemotional. “You wouldn't know where I might find him, I don't suppose?”

“I'm no stool, copper.”

“I know. I know. And besides, you're married to his daughter. Excuse me for asking. That was wrong.”

Drummond's lips quirked up at the corners. “Maybe I'm wrong,” he said thoughtfully. “Maybe I'd be a better citizen if I did do some stooling. Maybe it would be good for the town if you salted Vince away again. There's talk he's reorganizing his rackets, getting ready to make with the numbers and pinballs and two or three high-toned gambling joints. Maybe other things too. Things a vice squad wouldn't like.”

“Who do you think you're kidding?”



Nolan said. "We all know the rackets are still running. Maybe in a half-baked way, but operating just the same." His lips thinned. "They stopped a while, when I sent Gallardo up the river eight years ago, but they started again a few years later. Around the time I enlisted. Somebody took over."

Drummond shrugged. "Okay. That's the point. Gallardo figures to get his top spot back. I don't know who the head man is right now, but whoever he is he's going to find himself aced out when Gallardo starts muscling in."

"Maybe he won't start muscling in. Do you still think you'd be stooling if you tip me where to find him for a showdown?"

"Stool schmool. Since I got on the right side of the law I've changed my sense of values." Drummond hesitated. "A guy can be an upright citizen or he can be an ostrich with his head in the sand, an isolationist. I think I like being an upright citizen. You better mosey over to the Crystal Dolphin apartment hotel on Van Partlowe Boulevard. Apartment nine-seventeen. I'm not saying what you might find there."

"Suppose you take me."

Drummond shook his head. "Oh, no."

"You've got a car. I haven't."

"Nothing doing, copper. You think I want Maria to know I fastened the finger on her father? She'd divorce me, but quick. You remember how she ditched you when you pinched him the last time?"

Nolan took the gun out of his pocket. "A cop has the right to call on any private citizen for help. Let's go."

"Now listen—"

"Let's go, I said. You can stay in your car. I won't ask you to show yourself at the payoff. But I want transportation. You're it. Come on."

Drummond glowered. "I get it. You want to bust me up with Maria. Just because you didn't get her and I beat your time, you'd like to play dog in the manger."

"Get moving. You talk too much."

"Look, copper, I don't want any part of this."

"Get moving or I'll pistol-whip you

across the face." Nolan's patience was wearing threadbare. "I'm not kidding. More than one guy has found that out tonight."

"Like Luigi Santori, eh? Okay, chum, you're calling the tune. I hope you've got the right music." Drummond moved to his sedan; waited until Nolan was settled alongside him and then drove north in the direction of Van Partlowe Boulevard. In front of the Crystal Dolphin apartment hotel he parked. "Now what?"

NOLAN got out. "You can go now. Thanks for the lift." He went into the building, rode an elevator to the ninth floor and located the door of 917.

Voices came through the door, a girl's and a man's. The girl was Maria. "You've got to get away!" she was saying urgently. "He thinks you want the rackets back, and—"

"All I want is my glass," the man's voice said wearily. "Not the rackets, I'm through with that. I knew I was through, long before my prison time was up. From now on I'm clean. For your sake. But I want my glass. Those diamonds are worth almost a hundred thousand at today's prices. I can sell them and the money would keep both of us a long time. I gave them to him to hold for me. To hold while I was serving my sentence. I want them back. Nothing else matters, but I want my glass back."

"You can't risk your life for a handful of diamonds!" Maria sounded harried, desperate. "Don't you see how it will work out? If John Nolan gets killed, you'll be accused. Convicted. Sent to the electric chair. I begged him to run away but he wouldn't. He was too stubborn. He couldn't understand—and I didn't dare tell him. He might even come here with a g-gun and—and—"

Nolan had heard enough. He hit the door with his knuckles.

It opened, and Nolan looked moodily at Maria. Her father stood behind her, in the center of the room, a haggard, grey-haired man whose face bore the pallid marks of prison years. Nolan hauled out his gun and strode forward, brushing the

girl aside. "This is it, Gallardo," he said.

"No, Johnny!" That was Maria's choked, whimpering scream. "No, you can't, you mustn't!"

Nolan disregarded her and kept staring at her father. "I came to kill you. I don't like guys who try to put me on the spot."

"Nolan, wait," the old man said.

"There's nothing left to wait for. If you're packing heat, go after it. I'll count three. One—"

Maria wailed: "Johnny, you wouldn't!"

"Two," Nolan said.

"I haven't got a gun," Gallardo spoke through lips that seemed dry as parchment.

Nolan said: "Three," and pulled his trigger. He had already heard movement somewhere back of him. He fired, and fired again, the thunder of his automatic drowning out all other noises. All except Maria's sudden shrill scream. Nolan put three shots into the apartment's wall, over by a window; and then, behind him, the door burst open.

Mike Drummond rushed into the room. "So you killed him, hunh, copper?" Then Drummond tensed as he saw Gallardo still standing upright, unwounded, unhurt. "Hey, what the—?"

"I was expecting you," Nolan said, and covered him. "I knew you'd come to the payoff."

"Wh-wha-what—?"

"Tonight, at my house, you mentioned what I had done to Luigi Santori. That was a bad slip. It told me you knew who the three hoods were who drove me into that alley with their gunfire. Then, when I rode in your dark blue Packard, I noticed stains on the upholstery. Blood-stains. Still damp and sticky. I'd wounded a second gungsel in my alley fight to-night but he got away in a sedan, black or dark blue like yours. Things began to mesh in my mind. I put the picture together."

Drummond stared at him. "What picture?"

"You pretending to be going straight but actually heading up the city's rackets. You, the unknown boss who was scared

Gallardo would muscle back into the top spot now that he was out of prison. You, trying to get me knocked off so you could frame Gallardo for it and get rid of him. Or, if you didn't succeed in that, getting me into the notion of killing him."

"You must be nuts," Drummond said.

NOLAN shook his head. "It's pretty clear. You couldn't get a good crack at Gallardo; he stayed under cover, and if you murdered him you might be caught. So you rigged things for me to do your work. All your pretending unwillingness to drive me here, that was bunk. You were only too glad to bring me. And you followed me up to the apartment as soon as you dared. You hoped to walk in right after I'd done your killing for you. Then you wouldn't be suspected, and you'd be rid of the guy you feared. Gallardo. You were afraid he'd take back your rackets, when all the time the only thing he wanted was his glass; the diamonds he'd entrusted to you when I sent him up."

"That's—"

"He only wanted the diamonds so he could sell them and take Maria away and start life over again. He's harmless, and you tried to make me murder him. Your own father-in-law."

People started rushing toward the doorway now, neighbors drawn by the sound of recent gunfire. Nolan finished talking. "I shot into the wall, knowing you'd rush in. Now I've got you."

"That's what you think," Drummond said, and made a break for the door. He had a .32 in his fist, whipped out of a shoulder holster in a blur of motion, and he snarled: "The first guy tries to stop me gets drilled."

Nolan took deliberate aim and shot him through the head. Then, as Drummond pitched on his face, Nolan said: "I've made a widow of you, Maria." His voice was without inflection. "But at least your father will get his glass back."

She seemed not to be thinking about diamonds. In her eyes was a look of freedom, and perhaps a shining hint of the future.



# Careless Corpse

(Continued from page 19)

ured to waylay him, not knowing your old man was already attending to the job. Seems like violent ideas run in your family."

She sat up on the side of the bed and looked woeful. "I admit I—I had a crazy scheme to help my dad by—by d-doing something to Caffrey. But I wasn't g-going to shoot him. I just wanted t-to scare him—"

"Maybe so, sis, maybe so. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt on that. There's no use you going to the gow along with your pappy."

"You—you mean you're going to arrest him?"

"But definitely," I said. "And you're going to take me to him. Right now."

"I won't. You c-can't make me."

I grabbed her, lifted her to her feet. "You don't know me very well, toots. You're going to steer me to your father if I have to twist your arm off and beat you over the scalp with it." By way of demonstration I applied a mild hammerlock on her, not enough to hurt but demonstrating that I meant business. Then I forced her out of the room and downstairs.

**S**HE kept quiet until we were drifting through the dismal lobby. Then she tried to pull a fast one. "Help!" she

caterwauled to the clerk at the desk. "I'm being kidnaped!"

Percival Hassard leaped nimbly over the counter and made for me, trying to look like a hero coming to the aid of a lady in distress. "See here, Turner, what's the idea?"

"This," I said peevishly, and released the red-headed muffin just long enough to feint the guy wide open. He was a sucker for a right cross. I spooned him a haymaker on the prow that knocked him neck over appetite. Meanwhile Constance Faraday tried to run for the exit. She was a trifle too slow, though. I scampered after her, caught her, shook the bejimony out of her. "One more stunt like that and I'll start bearing down," I promised her. "Now be a good girl." And I escorted her out-doors.

She seemed to know she was licked. "You're a b-beast. A mean, cruel beast."

"I'm a detective solving a murder. Maybe that's the same thing," I said. "Now where will we find your father?"

She named a swanky apartment hotel on Wilshire, and I managed to flag a cruising night owl cab; boosted her into it and perched my heft alongside her. Riding along, I sat pretty close to her. I didn't want her to try any getaway tricks. Not under the circumstances.



**TOPS  
FOR  
QUALITY**

The cards were stacked against me.

They were stacked against her, too, as we found out when we entered the lavish suite where she and her dad were stopping. One gander was enough to tell me she was now an orphan. Her father was deader than minced clams.

**I**T WAS hard to separate all the mingled first impressions that slammed at me as the Faraday cupcake and I barged into the living room of the costly layout. To begin with, a middle-aged hombre wearing thick-lensed cheaters and an expensively tailored tuxedo was standing in a far corner, his puffy mush the color of paperhanger's paste and his framework twitching as if he had termites. I recognized him the instant I lamped him. He was Gerald Waxman, one of the toniest attorneys in Hollywood; a lawyer who specialized in movie work, his clients ranging from stars to producers and studio executives. The fees he charged were nothing but enormous, and he hadn't lost a suit in ten years. Right now, though, he looked as if he'd trade his entire fortune for a chance to get the hell out of that room.

You couldn't blame him much. Beyond him an elderly, grey-haired citizen was roped to a chair but not feeling any pain because he was defunct. The poor devil had felt plenty of pain before he'd passed to his reward, however. He was stripped to the waist, his feet were bare, and he'd been tortured. There were cigarette burns on his bare chest, and some dirty disciple had rammed sharpened matchsticks under his fingernails and toenails; set fire to them.

Constance Faraday copped one hinge and let out a shrill, hysterical shriek. "Daddy—!" Then, to Waxman: "What have you done to him? You—you—"

"I'm sorry, my dear," the lawyer found his voice. "He's dead. You must be brave."

"Brave?" she keened. "He's dead, and you—you stand there—you killed him and—" She whirled at me. "Arrest him! Take him to prison!"

Waxman looked at me. "Are you a policeman?"

"Private," I said. "What happened here?"

"I don't know. At least I don't know any more than you do by seeing for yourself. I dropped in a few minutes ago to have a little talk with Mr. Faraday—I'm his legal representative in his negotiations to take over control of Magnificent Studios—and I found him just like this. No, not exactly like this. He was still barely alive. He gasped out something about his weak heart, and something else I didn't quite understand—"

"Let's have the exact words," I said.

"It was . . . let me see . . . it was something like *he made me tell*. Yes, that was it. *He made me tell*."

"That was all?"

"Yes. Then—well, then he died."

The red-haired Faraday doll yelled: "You killed him!"

"Don't be absurd, my dear," Waxman was getting over his jitters now. "Why should I kill him? He was my client. A very valuable client."

"You murdered him!"

The guy got haughty. "I don't have to listen to that kind of talk."

"Arrest him, Mr. Turner!" the quail yelped wildly.

He gave me a fish-eyed focus. "I wouldn't advise that, sir. Unless you want a damage suit on your hands." He made for the door. "False arrest can make you a lot of trouble."

I said: "Stick around, pal, while I phone in the bleat."

"Don't let him leave!" the Faraday cutie shrilled. "He's a murderer! You can see that! He killed my father!"

Waxman frowned. "That's why I'm not staying. I refuse to stay anywhere and listen to such hysterical accusations." His hand went to the doorknob.

"Ix-nay," I said. "Stay put until the bulls get here."

"No. If you want my testimony, you can reach me easily enough. I live in the building." He started to open the door.

The red-haired Faraday chick sour-



ried to a table, picked up a heavy metal vase. "You won't leave! I won't let you!" she screamed. And she threw her improvised missile.

Her aim was lousy. Instead of hitting Waxman she clipped me on the scalp, spang at the spot where the phony mailman had maced me earlier in the scenario. My knees turned to boiled noodles and my brains got scrambled. I fell down on my profile, and the last I saw of Waxman was a black blur of tuxedo stalking off the premises. Then Constance Faraday hunkered down and started deluging me with her tears, begging me not to die and whimpering that she hadn't meant to bop me.

The hell with that, I thought dreamily. The hell with her apologies. The hell with everything. I was tired. My head hurt. I passed into a temporary coma.

**D**AVE DONALDSON was shaking me awake, roughing me up, spanking me across the chops. I blinked my peepers open, piped his surly features and said groggily: "Let's go home now. This is where we came in."

"Never mind the bright cracks, Sherlock. Snap out of it."

I snapped out of it, as requested. The fog drifted out of my think-tank and I sat up on my haunches. "What the hell brings you here, bud?" Then I caught wise. I looked at the Faraday wren, who was hovering nervously nearby. "You

phoned headquarters, hey, angel?"

"N-no," she said. "I didn't have time. You haven't been unconscious more than a few minutes."

I mulled this over. "Then Waxman must have."

"Waxman?" Dave growled. "I wouldn't know. All I know is I got another of those anonymous phone tips from a disguised voice that said I better rush to this apartment hotel if I wanted to pick up Dan Turner. And sure enough, here you are. With another corpse," he added bitterly. "Damn' if that isn't getting to be a habit!"

"Yeah," I admitted. "And it's even a worse habit to make wrong guesses. That dead gee there is a banker named Faraday, this young lady's papa. I figured he was the one who murdered Rick Caffrey in my igloo, but now I know I was haywire."

"You were haywire about a lot of things," Dave said in a menacing tone. "Like slugging me on the chin and scrambling a while ago. That's going to cost you, my friend."

I stood up experimentally, found I could stay on my feet without too much side-sway. "We can talk about that later," I said. I aimed toward the door. "Right now we've got work to do, a trip to make and a killer to catch."

"Just a minute. Not so fast. What—?"

"I'll explain as we go," I said. "Come on, get the lead out of your diapers.

## Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

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There's no time to lose." Then I added to the chick with the red tresses: "You, too, beautiful. You'll want to be on hand when we nab your father's murderer."

I must have sounded convincing, because she didn't give me an argument and neither did Donaldson. We trucked down to his official sedan and I told him to drive to the four-story fleabag hotel off Sunset where Caffrey had kept a secret room. "And don't spare the ethyl," I said. "This is important."

"It is if you come up with the guilty party," Dave said, kicking his starter and clashing the gears. "Otherwise you'll be in a three-dimensional jackpot and I'm not kidding."

"I'm not either," I said, and told him all I'd learned about the clambake. First I gave him a synopsis of Rick Caffrey's story as contained in the letter he'd never mailed to me; explained how Caffrey and Roger Faraday, the movie financier, had once been jailed in Georgia serving time for a bank heist. I told how Caffrey had recognized Faraday here in Hollywood a few days back, and had put the shakedown squeeze on him—not for dough, but for information as to the hiding place of the sixty grand that had been stolen twenty-odd years ago.

Dave fed a charge of ethyl to hustling cylinders. "Hell, that would be a perfect motive for Faraday to croak Caffrey!"

"No!" Constance wailed. "My dad didn't—he—he wouldn't—"

"Right you are, angel," I said. "Your father didn't kill Rick Caffrey. That was done by a third character who learned about the caper and craved to cut himself in for the sixty G's. He cut himself in by cutting Caffrey out—with a knife to the heart. Then the murderer went to your father and tortured him, forced him to tell where the dough was hidden. Remember, those were your dad's last words, according to Waxman. *He made me tell, he made me tell.* Then he died. His heart wasn't able to stand the torture-strain."

"But—but nobody knew—about my father's p-past."

DONALDSON berthed his bucket in front of the fleabag. "I'm beginning to get the picture," he said as he latched his brakes. "I see what Turner's getting at. Waxman was your old man's attorney; he would have the story."

The three of us barged into the hotel. "Maybe," I said. "But Waxman's a wealthy guy. Sixty grand wouldn't interest him to the point of making him a double killer." Then I strode straight over to the desk. "Here's your man," I said. "Okay, Percy Hassard, consider yourself pinched."

The sleekly barbered, sunken-cheeked room clerk goggled at me. "Pinched?" he bleated. "What for?"

I said: "Killery. Hang the nippers on him, Dave."

Donaldson hesitated. "Now look. Are you sure—?"

His hesitation was damned costly. It gave the Hassard character time to produce a Luger automatic from behind his counter. He aimed it at all of us. "Nobody's taking me out of here," he said through a tight kisser.

As far as I was concerned, the instant he pulled his roscoe he gave himself away. Only a guilty person would try such a trick, and I knew I'd make a bull's eye. So I took a chance and made another one. My right hand was in my coat pocket, clutching the Colt I had taken away from Constance Faraday up in Caffrey's room. I knew the counter's imitation marble was nothing but thin plastic. I fired through my coat and through the plastic, and I put a slug into Hassard's thigh.

Dave sprang over the counter past me, landed on the crawling guy and mashed him flatter than a bride's first cake. I kept going into the file room, piped a big fat Gladstone bag, yauked it forth and opened it.

Inside the bag I found a crumpled grey uniform: a postman's uniform. I also found a bloodstained knife, some wads of cotton and a cheap makeup kit. "This cinches it," I said. "He stuffed cotton in his mouth to make his cheeks



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look puffy. He used dabs of makeup for the counterfeit pimples or boils on his mush. He wore this grey outfit. And here are the thick-lensed spectacles that completed his disguise when he blackjacked me."

Donaldson stared. "You mean that's the knife he stabbed Caffrey with?"

"I'll lay you six, two, and even it fits the death wound," I said grimly. Then I peered down at the moaning Hassard. "Want to confess, pal?"

"You . . . cheap shamus . . . I'd like to . . . kill you . . .!"

"You've done enough of that," I said. "And we've got you dead to rights." I set fire to a gasper, blew the fumes in his twisted puss. "The way I see this clambake, Rick Caffrey got too careless in his attempt to put a shakedown on Roger Faraday, the financier whose name used to be Leonard Dolan. And Caffrey's carelessness made him a corpse. He made his original threatening phone call to Faraday from his room here in this hotel. Later he also phoned me and said he wanted to hire me. Okay. I think you must have operated the switchboard when he made those calls. You listened in. It was probably a habit with you; I saw you doing the same thing, tonight, when I first came here."

"Go . . . to . . . hell!"

I said: "By eavesdropping, you learned all about Caffrey's intention to make Faraday tell him where the stolen sixty G's were hidden down in Georgia. You also learned that Caffrey planned to send me a special-delivery letter outlining the details. So all you had to do was give Caffrey a fake phone message, ostensibly from me, asking him to call at my apartment in person. That's why he crumpled up his letter and threw it in

the waste basket. It's also why he came to my stash tonight. Meanwhile you disguised yourself as a postman, got to my tepee ahead of him, bashed me, and got me out of the way. Then when Caffrey night. But you made bad mistakes."

"Damn . . . you . . .!"

"Your next move, after tipping the cops they'd find a dead bozo in my joint, was to call on Faraday and torture him into telling you the hiding place of the sixty thousand clams. Unfortunately he had a bad heart and died, but that didn't matter to you as long as you had the information you wanted. You came back to this hotel and went on duty at midnight. But you made several bad mistakes."

"Such . . . as?"

I said: "When I was dragging Miss Faraday out of here and she yelled for help, you jumped at me and called me by name. Which indicated you knew me; you'd met me before somewhere. That wasn't a conclusive piece of evidence, I'll admit; but it made me do some thinking. And later, Lieutenant Donaldson got another anonymous telephone tip telling him he'd find me in Roger Faraday's apartment. Well, look. You were the only person who knew I dragged Miss Faraday out of this joint; the only person who could possibly suspect I would take her to her own apartment, which she shared with her father. Therefore you were the only person who could phone in the anonymous tip to headquarters. And if you were the tipster it meant you were also the murderer. Which I've proved."

"You sure have," Donaldson said admiringly. "I don't know how the hell you do it, but you always do."

"I read tea leaves," I said.

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*hollywood*  
**DETECTIVE**



# The Riddle Thumbs a Ride

(Continued from page 51)

drops. The smoke had an unpleasant odor, like the burning of wet rags. Five would get you fifty that there actually were wet rags smoldering in the fire chamber.

I proved it by opening the feedbox, reaching in and dragging forth a sodden mass of cloth, steamy, hot as hell and laced with discouraged runners of flame. Tossing the spoils onto the ground, I let the downpour quench the glowing places. Then I scooped up the ragged remnants, whirled, started back toward the Macklin igloo—and ran smack into Dave Donaldson.

"You—!" he yodeled. Then he unshipped his service .38, flourished it under my trumpet and triumphantly thundered: "Lift the flippers, bright eyes! You're nabbed, and this time I mean you're going to stay nabbed. That or get perforated like a used meal-ticket."

## CHAPTER V

### Switched Surprise

I DIDN'T want to get perforated; my clothes were already leaking like a sieve and an assortment of bullet holes would increase the damage. "All right," I sighed wearily. "You've got me."

"Yeah."

"And I've got Mrs. Macklin's killer."

"No," he said. "I've got Mrs. Macklin's killer. You."

I dished him a jaundiced glower. "It seems to me we've played this very same scene before, several times."

"What scene, wise guy?"

I said: "You arresting me for something I didn't do, when all the time I'm hep to the genuine guilty party."

"It's different this trip. We've got the deadwood on you. And to make it stick, didn't you try to lam? That's the same as a confession."

"Cynthia Blessmere tossed that same line at me," I said. "She was as haywire

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as you are, and I think a phone call will prove it. Anyhow I hope it will," I added grimly.

Dave regarded me with speculative glimmers. "Phone call?"

"To headquarters." I nodded. "You can make it yourself and if you get the right answer you can draw your own conclusions."

"Now wait, wisenheimer. Why should I call headquarters?"

"To ask a question."

"What question?" he demanded querulously. "Do I have to get this out of you with a nut-pick?"

I said: "Not if you'll be reasonable. All you have to do is get in touch with Homicide—"

"Dammit to hell, I'm Homicide!"

"I mean the autopsy surgeon, and quit interrupting," I growled peevishly. "Phone him and see if he's performed a post mortem on Mrs. Macklin's husk."

"What do you mean, post mortem? There won't be one until I've ordered it—"

"You did," I said.

"Hunk?"

"You gave instructions for a complete examination, with especial reference to an analysis of the stomach contents."

He clapped a hand to his forehead. Unfortunately it was the mitt in which he was clenching his Police Positive, which resulted in his dealing himself a resounding thump on the scone. "One of us must be insane," he moaned softly. "Ouch." Violently he rubbed the knob he had raised on his scalp. "I did no such thing. I haven't been in touch with headquarters since I got here."

"I have," I said.

"You—hah? What's that you yodeled?"

"I said I've been in touch with headquarters. I used your name and ordered the post mortem."

He looked up at heaven as if seeking solace, but heaven merely dumped a gallon of rainwater in his optics. "You . . . you—" he muttered in choked accents. "You—"

"Let's not be repetitious," I told him. "Go phone the surgeon and ask him

about those stomach contents. Particularly whether or not there were traces of unassimilated alcohol present."

He favored me with a plaintive stare. "Alcohol? Why?"

"Never mind. I'll explain later. Will you make the call or do you want this whole fish-fry to fall apart?"

He said gloomily: "I'll make it. I don't know why it is, but I'm always doing what you want me to do. You hex me. You've got the evil eye on me. For years." He shoved me toward the house and we went in by the service porch, gained the kitchen.

There was a wall phone over by the butler's pantry and Dave dialed it while muttering in his beard. After a while he got his connection, asked what I wanted him to ask.

PRESENTLY he hung up, turned to me. The mystification on his map made him resemble a moron trying to learn differential calculus. "Okay," he said despondently. "No alcohol."

"You're sure?"

"They said no trace of alcohol in the stomach contents. What more do you want?"

I said: "I want a pinch. Come on!" and dragged him toward the front of the wigwam. We barreled into the reception hall, headed into the last act of this dopey drama.

The scene that met Dave's glimmers made him draw up short in utter stupefaction. You couldn't blame him for that. Tim Macklin had now recovered consciousness where I'd knocked him cold when I jumped down on him from the middle of the staircase five or ten minutes before. The cowboy hambo was exactly where I'd left him, still handcuffed to the newel post of the stairway banister. He was groaning from the pain of his fractured slats but aside from this he seemed in fair shape.

Hovering around him were his daughter and her British better half. Cynthia and Cedric were whacking away at the newel post in an effort to knock it loose from its anchorage so they could slip off



the second handcuff and free the old man from durance. They weren't getting anywhere, though; the post was too rugged for them.

Donaldson copped a flabbergasted hinge at Macklin in manacles and screeched: "You mean *he's* the killer?"

I withheld my answer until I took out my ring of keys, unlocked the hambo's wrists. Then, pivoting, I suddenly snicked one cuff on Cynthia's wrist and the other on Cedric's, thus nippering husband and wife together at one fell swoop. "No," I said. "Macklin didn't croak Connie. These two did."

The ensuing minute was thick with uproar, blue with profanity. Blessmere and the brunette cookie joined in a duet of guttersnipe language, called me every dirty name they could think of. A long-shoreman could have taken lessons from them, and a mule-skinner would have blushed with embarrassment.

I waited until they ran out of breeze. "Finished?" I asked. It seemed that they were, so I went on: "Okay, now comes the boring part. It's the last chapter, where the clever detective tells how he broke the case."

They glared poison at me.

"It goes like this," I said. "A dame thumbed me for a ride. I gave it to her. She was alive when I brought her home. Five minutes later she was defunct with a charge of buckshot in her bellows and her flesh was cooled off—and no gunshot had been heard. Moreover, no pellets were in my coupe's upholstery. That looks impossible, doesn't it? As a matter of fact it was impossible. It didn't actually happen that way at all."

"All right, genius," Cynthia jeered. "What *did* happen?"

I set fire to a gasper, spoke through a cloud of fumes. "It's a switch routine."

"Switch routine?" Blessmere stared at me narrowly.

I nodded. "Connie Macklin was supposed to have left home this evening in her car, destination unknown. In reality her destination was death. She never got off these grounds. You two lice ambushed her, probably out in the garage; blew a

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hole in her. It's been raining all night and the storm probably helped to muffle the report; besides, if you shot her in the garage with the doors closed there wouldn't have been a noticeable noise here in the house proper; no more than the sound of a distant backfire or something. I'm assuming there were no servants upstairs over the garage; very likely they'd been dismissed, given the evening off. That would have to be part of the plan."

"Yes, the servants were off tonight," Tim Macklin mumbled in a dazed voice. "But . . . but—"

**I** THANKED him for that much corroboration and turned again to his daughter and her husband. "Okay, Connie was now defunct. But a corpse is a hard thing to dispose of, and if her shell was found here on the estate the finger would be on everybody living here—including you two. Your problem, then, was to have the kill discovered elsewhere."

"Dream on, wise guy," Cynthia said.

"Much obliged; I intend to." I crushed out my cigarette. "You wanted it to appear that Connie had been bumped somewhere else. It's a dangerous stunt, though, to cart a cadaver around town in an automobile. Anything could go haywire. You might have an accident. Or violate a traffic law and be stopped by cops. Or somebody might be sharp enough to notice the kind of cargo you're freighting. Therefore you decided on a switch act. Instead of taking the dead doll away from the estate you stashed her right here on the grounds and drove away yourself—*impersonating her*."

The brunette jane stiffened. "Oh, yes?"

"Yes, indeed. You took her car and went to Annandale; parked it behind the golf course. You wore a dress that duplicated what Connie herself was wearing; you'd planned for that in advance, had a similar frock made for yourself. Now, wearing those duds, all you needed was a red wig to match your stepmother's hair. That plus a generous daubing of mud on your mush, which is a very effective disguise on a dark and stormy night."

"Are you trying to say I—"

I rasped: "Yeah. I'm saying you were the filly who flagged me for a lift. When I picked you up you pretended you were Connie. I believed you: why not? I'd never met her. You did a damned good acting job, too. Shivering. Playing like you were sick. Hell, I was so worried about you that I insisted on giving you a snort of my precious Scotch, remember? And that snifter tripped you, baby."

"How?" she challenged me.

"I'll come to that presently. Meanwhile where was I? Oh, yeah. I brought you home in my heap, parked you under the porte-cochere while I barged around front and rang the doorbell for help. You'd fooled me into thinking you were unconscious but that also was an act. The instant my back was turned you blipped out of my jalopy; then, together with your husband, you placed Connie's corpse—the real corpse which had been hidden here on the grounds the entire time—you stuffed it into my chariot where you'd been slumped an instant before. No wonder Macklin and I found a defunct dame when we looked. You and Cedric had put her there. She was in a frock like yours; she was soaked to the skin. And you'd daubed a lot of mud on her to match your own mush. It was a smart twist; a switch guaranteed to fool almost anybody."

Macklin looked at his brunette daughter as if he'd spawned an ogre. "My heavens!" he whispered.

**I** WENT on talking to the chick. "Having planted the body in my coupe, you dashed indoors; went in the back way. You peeled out of your wet threads, washed the mud off your map, slipped into a negligee. Pretty soon you heard your father fighting with me outside; that was the cue for you and Cedric to come rushing out and take a hand in the brawl. Everything went like clockwork. Now I was your fall guy. You'd picked me at random; any bozo riding alone past Annandale would have done as well. All you had to do was say Connie had been a tramp; that she'd had a lot of



boy-friends. This created the natural suspicion that I was one of her sweeties and that I was the one who'd croaked her before toting her home."

"Make it stick. I dare you!"

I said: "Well, there's the question of motive. You hated Connie; you'd have hated any doll your dad married. It was probably an obsession—although maybe dough entered into it too. I think it did. Your old gent's new wife would come in for half his geetus some day when he passed to his reward; but if he didn't have a wife, you and Cedric would inherit it all. Cedric being a sponger, a scenario scribbler who hardly ever sold any scenarios, why naturally he'd be willing to work with you in your killery scheme. In fact, the whole plot sounds like something a hack writer like Cedric would originate. And considering the impersonation angle, it had to be pulled by some she-male who was close to Connie and would know what clothes she was wearing; somebody who could duplicate those duds. All of which pointed to you."

"And your proof?"

I grinned at her. "Don't worry, I've got you nailed three separate ways. First, the cupcake who thumbed a ride with me took a swig of my Vat 69. We've just had an autopsy report from the medical examiner at headquarters. He performed a post mortem on Connie's carcass, analyzed the stomach contents. There was no alcohol present. Therefore, obviously she wasn't the dame who rode in my bucket and swigged my skee."

"What else?"

"Second, when I was in your boudoir a while ago I realized you were prolonging our conversation, deliberately hoping to keep me on tap until somebody came in and nabbed me. You'd dumped me in a jackpot and wanted to keep me there—still trying to make me the fall guy. Unfortunately for you, you'd selected a private snoo p to take the rap; and private snoops aren't easy to frame. All the time you were delaying me, I was stringing you. I asked you what guys Connie had played around with and you couldn't give

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me names or facts; therefore you were lying about her lovers. She'd never had any. She was decent. Then I got a break. Cedric barged in and didn't notice me at first. He mentioned that he had burned something but you shut him up quick. He'd said enough, though, to put me hep. And I found the duplicate costume in the incinerator; the dress you had worn when you thumbed me down in front of the golf course."

"You . . . you can't prove I wore it. Maybe some other girl—"

I said: "Sheep-dip, kiddo, sheep-dip. Your fingerprints will be on my fifth of Vat 69 where you held it to your kisser and had a snort. I've got you and Cedric by the short hair."

That cooked her. It also cooked the Englishman. He yanked at the handcuff which linked him to Cynthia and

snailed: "You brainless buzzard, if you hadn't picked up a detective this wouldn't have happened!"

"If you hadn't planned it with all the complications we'd never have got caught!" she squalled back at him. Then she seemed to savvy she'd confessed. "Oh, you f-fool!" she whimpered. "Now we're done for!"

She was right, of course. Dave Donaldson took both of them to the gow in a hell of a yank; but the guy I pitied was Tim Macklin. The cowboy hambo's gorgeous wife had been bumped by his own daughter and son-in-law and now he had nobody. He was a tired old man, and he was all alone.

I said softly: "Sorry, pal," and went out into the rain. Then, as I drove away, all the lights in the house went off one by one.

## Death on the Downbeat

*(Continued from page 85)*

thought. Somebody double crosses you and smashes your dreams, and you take it lying down. And then, if you wait long enough, your chance comes to get even. To drain out all the hate that's been festering inside you. Maybe there really was such a thing as justice.

It was going to hit Barbara hard, learning her old man had been killed. She'd loved him, and it was going to hurt. It would hurt worse, knowing her husband had done it. Knowing she was married to a murderer. She loved him, too. She must have loved him or she wouldn't have eloped with him. Now she was going to lose him to the electric chair. Well, that was her tough luck. She'd made her bed. She wouldn't get any sympathy out of me. In a little while she would find out what it meant to have your dreams smashed. She would find it out the hard way.

I went inside. The place smelled like a

pesthole. Tobacco smoke and the reek of stale beer eddied in the dim purple light, with brighter lights centering on the bandstand at the far end of the long narrow room. Along one side was a bar. The other side had booths and tables. All occupied. A lot of damned-fool jitterbugs were cutting up touches on the dance floor to the savage rhythm of Al Carlin's crew.

Carlin stood downstage front, facing the orchestra, his back to the dancers. He was a playing leader. He gave the tempo and fiddled at the same time. Now and then he used his violin bow as a baton. He looked tall and tailored in his tux, and presently when the number was over he turned and gave the clapping crowd a nice studious smile, his glasses reflecting the colored footlights and his violin held in front of him, the bridge side turned in to his lean middle.

The back of the instrument was smooth dark wood—except for a blond streak in



the center. An insert strip the color of honey. The color of Barbara's hair.

I felt a sudden tightness in my throat. Then I shoved forward and found the door that led backstage. I came to the wings of the bandstand. I said loudly: "Al."

Carlin glanced my way, saw me and came to me. "You got out here pretty fast, Pat. Still looking for Rudy?"

"I don't know," I said. My voice didn't sound like mine. My finger shook when I pointed with it. "Where'd you get that fiddle, Al?"

"This?" He twirled it. "Why? Do you recognize it? You ought to. It was Pop Harcourt's."

"I didn't ask you that. I asked you where you got it."

He frowned a little. He didn't seem to like my tone of voice. "Is that you talking, Pat? Or is it your badge?"

"Just answer my question," I said. "Where'd you get the fiddle? Tell me and tell me quick."

HE lifted a shoulder. "I bought it. From Rudy. He finally talked old man Harcourt into selling it."

"Is that what he told you?"

"Sure. I gave him three hundred for it. Three one-hundred-dollar bills. Why?" Then his eyes narrowed behind the glasses. "Hey, wait a minute, Pat. Are you trying to tell me there was something phony about the deal?"

"Something very phony," I said. Suddenly I felt tired, knowing what was ahead of me. Knowing what I had to do. "Where can I find Ferranti?"

"In Barbara's dressing-room. It's intermission time right now, and he'll be in there with her."

"Show me the way," I said.

He led me along a narrow hallway that needed ventilating. We came to a closed door and I shoved him aside. I opened the door without knocking first.

Barbara was sitting in front of her dressing table, touching up her makeup. Her hair was the color of honey and her face was the wistful little-girl face that had been haunting me these past two



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years. A trifle more mature, maybe. And there were tired lines around her eyes, I thought. But aside from that she'd hardly changed at all.

Neither had Ferranti. Those swarthy, wiry ones never change. I saw him turn around, fast, and stare at me as I came in.

I still couldn't quite understand why Barbara had ever fallen for him. He was nothing but cheap flash. And she hadn't had such an easy time of it since she married him. I wondered how much she loved him now. I wondered if two years of being hooked up with a phony had disillusioned her. It was something I had to know.

Ferranti said: "Whitney!" and Barbara said: "Pat!" and I waved them both quiet. I told them I would do the talking, and never mind about how surprised they were to see me here; it wasn't a social call, it was professional.

They looked at me. Barbara steadily and Rudy shiftily.

I said: "You dad's dead, Babs."

Her makeup was suddenly splotchy against cheeks that had gone white. "Pat—"

"He was murdered," I said.

She started to get up off the bench in front of the dressing table but didn't quite make it. She sank down again. She was trying to say something, but no words came.

"His Enamieri was stolen," I said.

She found a fragment of her voice. "Pat—you're joking!"

"He was killed for his violin," I said. I wasn't enjoying this. Maybe I should have enjoyed it, but I didn't. I said: "What would you think if I told you your husband killed him?"

Rudy jumped at me. He was fast on his feet. He always had been. He was fast with his tongue, too. He called me a name.

I sidestepped him and hit him in the belly. He gasped and went backward. He wouldn't try that again for a while. I raised my voice and said: "Al, come in here."

Carlin walked into the dressing room. He had the Enamieri in his hands. He

went past me and shoved the instrument at Ferranti. "Take this and give me my money back, you creep."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," Rudy said. He wouldn't touch the violin. "What money? Where the hell did you get that fiddle?"

"You know where I got it. You sold it to me."

"That's a lie!" Rudy yelled.

"I paid you three hundred-dollar bills." Carlin looked at me. "Why don't you search him, Pat?"

I did just that. I found the three bills in the side pocket of Ferranti's coat. This was the clincher. Not that I needed a clincher.

Ferranti said: "It's a frame, a lousy stinking frame. I don't know anything about—" The denial seemed to choke him. He scuttled to Barbara. "Don't let them do this to me, hon. They're railroading me. They're—"

Yellow. I'd always suspected he was yellow. And now I knew. I watched Barbara. She touched him with her hand. Soothingly, the way a mother touches a scared kid. When she looked at him there was something in her eyes that had never been in them whenever she looked at me. Not even when we were engaged. "It's all right, Rudy," she said. Her tone was quiet. Gentle.

"Hon, I didn't bump your old man. I don't know anything about it. I swear I don't."

"I believe you," she said.

SO she believed him. But that wouldn't keep him out of the electric chair. I had evidence and I had corroborative testimony that would send him up. He was married to the girl I loved, and I could make her a widow. So much for the revenge part. There was something else I was thinking about, something even bigger. Maybe when Barbara was a widow I might have another chance. In time maybe I could mend some of those dreams she'd smashed for me when she married Rudy Ferranti.

I got out my handcuffs.

The guy cringed. And Barbara looked



at him again the way she had never looked at me. The way she would never look at me. Suddenly I understood. It wasn't just love that held her to him, it was more. It was something protective, something you couldn't put into words. She knew him for what he was. Yellow. A loud-mouth. A cheap flash. That was why she married him. It was why she'd stick to him no matter what happened. Because he needed her. He was a scared kid in the dark, and he needed her. It had taken me a long time, but now I knew.

And I knew I wouldn't send him to the chair. I could, and I'd love it. But I wouldn't. Because I realized he wasn't guilty. I'd realized this for quite a while. I turned, took the Enamieri away from Al Carlin and snapped the handcuffs on him.

**A**L choked and stiffened and rattled the cuffs. His eyes were hot and angry behind the glasses he wore. "What the hell is this, Pat, a gag? I didn't crack pop's skull—"

"Yes you did," I said. "You just confessed it. I never told you how he was killed. So how could you know his skull was cracked? Unless you were there. Unless you cracked it."

"Now wait, Pat."

I said: "But that's not what gave you away. It was the fiddle that tripped you."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Look," I said. "You're one of the few who knew pop owned an Enamieri. I think you were the thief he caught stealing it."

"You're nuts. I'm making plenty of money. Why should I steal a fiddle I could afford to buy? Besides, the kind of music I play these days, I don't need an expensive violin."

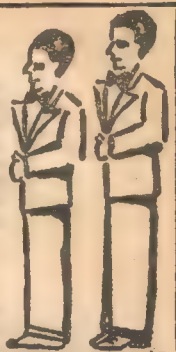
"I thought of that," I said. "But you used to be in love with Barbara, same as I was. And you hated the idea of her being hooked to a louse like Rudy. I think you stole the Enamieri with the idea of causing trouble, maybe breaking up her marriage. I think you intended to plant it on Rudy, so he'd be accused. So Barbara

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would be disgusted with him and maybe divorce him."

I was guessing, of course. But I must have been pretty close to the mark. Carlin's expression told me that.

I said: "But pop caught you in the act. You had to kill him. So then I think you decided your original scheme would still work. Only better. Now you could frame Rudy for murder as well as theft. All you had to do was to slip three bills in the side pocket of his coat—where, incidentally, a guy never carries that kind of money loose. And then deliberately show off the Enamieri where I'd see it and recognize it. You'd say Rudy sold it to you, and you would have him nailed to the cross."

"He did sell it to me."

I said: "No, you slipped up on your logic there, Al. Whatever else Rudy may be, he's smart. Always was. If he had murdered pop while stealing the violin, he would have ditched it. The dumbest killer in the world would have brains enough to realize that the fiddle was the one thing that would link him to the murder. His first instinct would be to get rid of it. Hide it. Even destroy it, to make sure it was never found on him, never connected with him in any way. Selling it to you was the one thing Rudy wouldn't have done. He'd be putting himself in the electric chair for a lousy three hundred dollars. It wasn't plausible. You lied. You were trying to frame him. I saw that right away."

"Can you make it stick?" he asked me. Not blustering. He really wanted to know.

I told him I thought I could. And I meant it.

"All right," he said. "I'll take a plea."

He wouldn't look at Barbara and Rudy when he said it. But I did. For the first time in two years I could look at them without hate. "Better start for home, you two," I said. I was thinking there would be funeral arrangements to make. Details to be taken care of. "And—I'm sorry about pop."

Barbara said softly: "Thanks, Pat." Just the two words. But they covered a lot of things. She and her husband went out.

Presently a squad car of homicide guys came to take Al Carlin off my hands. They brought Lester Harcourt with them, and all the rest of it was routine. Except when the kid saw the cuffs on Al. He didn't understand that. It wasn't what he had expected. After they took Al away he said: "But, Pat, I... I thought you were going to pinch Rudy."

"I almost did. I almost made that mistake." He would never know how big a mistake I had come near making.

He looked at me. His eyes still reminded me of sister's, but I didn't mind that any more. "But, Pat—"

"Skip it, Butch."

He got it. I'd called him Butch.

I put my arm around his shoulder. "Come on, Butch. I'll take you home."

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# Treachery Pulls the Trigger

(Continued from page 99)

at the Metrovox lot. He said he would g-guh-go there right away."

"Hell's bells and hot popcorn!" I said, and dived for the door. "Come on, Lard, we've got to make knots! Bergstrom's got a thirty-minute start on us and there's no time to lose!"

**D**RIVING across town to the Metrovox studio was ten minutes of unadulterated nightmare. I souped my cylinders with all the ethyl they'd drink; cut a roaring gash in the night and damn the motorcycle cops, if any. Luckily, there were none. Before you could recite the Declaration of Independence in pig-Latin I whammed to a shuddering stop at the Metrovox main gates; thrust my badge and credentials at the uniformed guard. "Open up and let me through," I caterwauled. "I've got to see Lorine Duvall."

"Oh, yeah?" he sounded as nasty as fertilizer. "Just hold onto your horses, mister. You want to see Lorine Duvall, but does she want to see you? That's the question." He moved toward his glassed-in sentry booth. "I'll phone her and ask her."

I hopped from my jalopy, strode forward with my dukes balled. "Never mind phoning. I showed you my shield."

"Private tin," he sneered. "You can buy them things a dime a dozen at Woolworth's." Avarice slid into his optics and he made a secretive rubbing movement of his thumb over the fingertips of his right hand. "Of course, now, if you really wanted to get inside bad enough to make it worth, say, a sawbuck, why, who knows but what it might be arranged."

I said softly: "You sell yourself too cheap, pal. I prefer to bribe you this way." And I popped him on the wattles, dumped him on his cornerstone, and left him lying on the ground, colder than a Siberian's nose. Then I unfastened the

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big wrought iron entrance gate, swung it open, dashed back to my vee-eight, and drove hellity-larrup onto the lot.

Presently I parked hard by a big barn-like sound stage building, the only one that showed lights. Its heavy door stood open and a green bulb burned alongside the portal, indicating it was okay to mosey in; no scene was being shot at the moment or the door would have been closed and the signal red. Taking Fatso Volmer with me, I blipped over the threshold and picked a path over a scattering of props and heavy electric cables; came to a set dressed to represent the interior of a railroad terminal's main waiting room. Several grips and juicers were standing around doing nothing, a carpenter on an overhead catwalk was making noise with a hammer and nails, and in a far corner a group of costumed extras played gin rummy on an upturned soap box.

Kliegs, baby spots, silken light shields, and aluminum-painted reflectors were arrayed in strategic disorder around the set, but the only illumination came from six or seven raw, unshaded Mazdas that dangled down from the vaulted ceiling; not until the cameras started to grind would the Mazdas be doused and the Kliegs turned on. I spotted a party sitting in a director's folding canvas arm-chair, studying a script; hotfooted over to him and tapped him on the shoulder. "Pardon my curly tonsils, brother, but are you in charge here?"

He squinted up at me through thick-lensed, horn-rimmed cheaters. "Yes. Go away. I'm busy."

"So I see. I'm looking for Lorine Duvall."

"Help yourself. Why bother me?"

"I thought maybe you could tell me where to look," I said in a meek tone.

"Try her dressing bungalow. Last one on the left-hand row behind Sound Stage Five. That's where she said she was going when I called a recess five minutes ago."

"She was working here on the set until then?"

He emitted an irritated snort. "Yes. Go away. Shoo. Scat."

I DUCKED out fast; latched onto Fatso at the doorway. "Maybe we're in luck," I told him as I yanked him out into the moonless night. "That half-hour start Skinny had on us didn't do him much good. The Duvall quail was acting a scene until five minutes ago, so Bergstrom hadn't got to her until then, if at all."

"Hunh?" he looked stupid. "How's that again?"

I tried to clear it up for him as we scurried around back of Sound Stage Five. "Suppose Skinny did get here half an hour ahead of us," I said. "Suppose he bribed the gate guard to let him onto the lot—a reasonable assumption, since we know the guard can be bought for as little as ten bucks, Okay. During that time, the Duvall doll was working a scene; Skinny couldn't get to her as long as the red light was burning. Well, the director called a recess just five minutes ago, and Miss Duvall went to her dressing bungalow. That would be Skinny's first chance to contact her, and now we're right on his heels."

"It must be nice to be a smart detective," the fat guy said. "I guess it takes brains, huh?"

I shushed him quiet. We were practically on top of Lorine Duvall's dressing bungalow, and I could see lights at the open windows. I could also hear voices, one nasal and raspingly masculine, the other angrily she-male with a trace of French accent.

"You must be out of your mind!" the she-male voice said. That was the Duvall cupcake talking. "You are crazeel!"

Skinny Bergstrom was the man talking back to her. "What's so crazy about offering to settle a debt for ten cents on the dollar? Why hell, lady—"

"Do not use the profanity on me, you cockon! How dare you intrude upon my private quairtaires and frighten me out of the wits and make the demand for moneys I do not owe?"

"You owe it, all right. You know you



do. Fifteen thousand dollars that you dropped to Nick Hardesty on the dice. So Nick don't want no trouble, see? He sent me over to collect ten per cent and call it square. Just slip me fifteen hundred—"

Skulking by the bungalow's front door, I pinched Fatso's forearm. "Hear that?" I whispered. "Your pal Skinny is trying to pull a swift one. If he can notch the jane for fifteen centuries, he'll put it in his own pocket for scrambling purposes."

"Why, the heel!" Fatso was indignant.

Inside the cottage, the French muffin's voice lifted in fury. "Not one centime will I pay to you. I have settled the debt. Your *Monsieur* Hardesty is a great fool if he thinks he can make me pay more than I have already paid.

"*Oui*. I settled with him for half the amount. In cold cash, I handed this very afternoon seventy-five hundred dollars to your part—Aie-ee-ek! My throat . . . your fingers—"

**B**ERGSTROM was choking her, threatening to break her neck nine ways from Sunday unless she kicked through with some geetus. This was my cue for action. I slammed myself at the door, crashed it inward and went hurtling over the threshold, knowing I now had the answer to the riddle of Nick Hardesty's murder. "Avast!" I roared, and plunged at the bony Bergstrom bozo.

He had his mitts wrapped around Lorine Duvall's windpipe in a savage, throttling strangle-hold that had already begun to turn her piquant Gallic map blue around the fringes. Her midnight hair was loosened in lovely disorder and her dress was torn open from neck to New Hampshire as she struggled in his clutches, just like the climax of a B picture. I leaped in, grasped the thin gee from behind, unpeeled him from his sobbing victim, and swung him around; got ready to kayo him.

He pulled a knife on me, slashed at me with it.

I ducked the glittering shiv barely in time to keep from getting my tonsils amputated from the outside. And then

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Speed Fiction Reader!

Fatso Volmer stepped into the room, drew a pint-size automatic, aimed it. The tiny gat sneezed: *Ka-Chee!* and planted a pill neatly in Bergstrom's right eyeball. Bergstrom fell down and was suddenly as dead as the Petrified Forest.

"Thanks, chum," I said to the porky guy. Whereupon I dug out my own .32 Colt and shot the miniature roscoe out of his hand, taking a couple of fingers with it.

Fatso yeepped and stared at his bleeding duke. "You . . . you—oh, lookit what you've went and did! My hand—I'm ruined! Oh—!"

"You won't be needing your hand when you go to the gas chamber for croaking Nick Hardesty," I said.

He fixed the glassy focus on me. "Wh-what-what?"

"I began suspecting you when you started sticking so close to me," I told him. "It didn't seem plausible, unless you wanted to keep an eye on my movements. And the trick you pulled on Lieutenant Donaldson of the homicide squad so we could both escape: that benefited you as much as it did me. More, maybe."

"Hey, now wait—"

I SAID: "Then, when we were discussing Hardesty's death, your verbal picture of it was pretty damned graphic. You spoke of him sitting at his desk, going over his accounts and not expecting anything violent, when he was shot by a Spanish .25. Of course you talked as if Miss Duvall did the shooting; but how the hell could you have been hep to so many of the small details?"

"Why, I . . . that is—"

"However," I said, "I needed to find out your murder motive before I could tie you down. So I let you string along with me, and a moment ago I overheard

enough of the dialogue between Bergstrom and this Duvall filly to tell me what your motive was. She claimed she had already settled her gambling debt to Nick Hardesty by paying half of it, seventy-five hundred clams. Just before Skinny began choking her, she said: *I paid it to your part—* And then his fingers cut off the word. But what she started to say was: *I paid it to your partner.* Meaning you, Fatso."

"Listen . . . you can't—"

I said: "Then I got hep. You had collected the dough from Miss Duvall but hadn't turned it over to Hardesty. You figured to keep it for yourself. Maybe you'd worked the same shenanigan on various other suckers who owed Nick money. Nick found it out and accused you, so you shot him to his ancestors. Then, as if nothing had happened, you went out and joined Skinny Bergstrom to kidnap me."

"Hell, I . . . you—"

"It all meshes," I said. "Miss Duvall couldn't have got into Hardesty's office to croak him, because the front door of the publishing building was locked. On the other hand, you had a key. I cinched it just now by letting you shoot Skinny."

"Look, Mr. Turner. I saved your life."

"Yeah. By drilling him with a small-caliber gat. A Spanish .25 automatic. I'll lay odds a ballistics test will match your rod with the slug that cooled Hardesty. Want to bet?"

He seemed to deflate, like a balloon with a slow leak. "You . . . you mean you're going to turn me in? After I kept you from being stabbed?"

"Damned right," I said grimly. Then I looked at the disheveled Duvall quail. "Call the cops, baby."

She went to her phone on the other side of the bungalow and called the cops.

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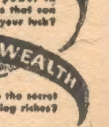
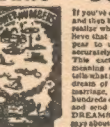
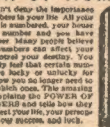
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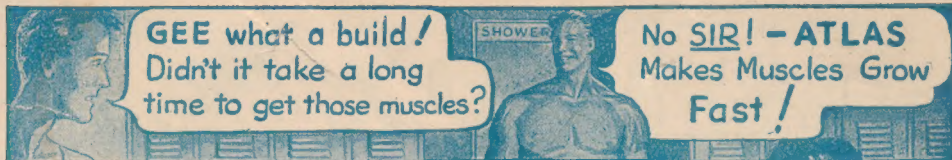
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